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BEYOND THE STATED FUNCTION: Showcasing, through everyday objects, social obstacles imposed on Qatari female youth

Kazem Esra

Virginia Commonwealth University

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Acknowledgments

Throughout life there are people around us who support us, believe in us, push us to be better and stronger. I have assumed that as one grows, supporters become fewer because one becomes more adept in navigating life. We progress from the support of parents and siblings to the increasing support of friends, teachers, peers and colleagues. Disproving my assumption, my experiences have proven the growth of one's support system in life. Many people have supported me in my journey, and I would like to take a moment to thank all of those who helped me, not only through the thesis journey but also through life.

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Written by: Esra Kazem

Edited by: Jean Hodges

Advising Committee: Line Ulrika Christiansen, Paolo Cardini and Byrad Yyelland

Reader: Carol Hansen

Grammarian: Byrad Yyelland

Typeface: TheSansArabic

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Figure 1. Project 8

1. Abstract

This critical design project showcases obstacles that the Qatari culture and society impose on their female youth, hindering them from becoming independent individuals. It critiques the society and its social pressures. It stimulates people to think by challenging narrow assumptions and perceptions. The uncovering of those assumptions can provoke action. This study highlights the effects of social perception and judgment, family authority, and gender favoritism, on the Qatari female youth. It intends to stimulate their awareness and then, through them, it communicates this impact to the society in a seemingly humorous way. Humor is used because it often can bring complex matters to people in simpler and more acceptable language. Through means of critical design, personal everyday objects, and humor, the project aims to communicate the social and cultural forces which impede Qatari female youths' becoming individuals who dream, achieve, and thrive.

The critically designed personal everyday objects are hybridized accessories and fashion items embedded with a meta-meaning that arouses curiosity, invites questions, and stimulates thoughts. Through the design of these appealing, high quality, and functionally viable everyday personal objects, the project highlights Qatari female youths' individuality. This Individuality contributes to their becoming the foundation that Qatar will need to depend on to achieve its National Vision 2030¹. The project values culture and tradition, while calling to consciousness those cultural and societal practices that obstruct the development of young Qatari female individuals and their critical thinking abilities.

¹ This is a list of development goals that aims at transferring Qatar into an advanced country by 2030.

2. Introduction

a. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This research investigates the possibility of critically redesigning everyday objects that are commonly used in the life of the Qatari female youth, to uncover some of the internal and external reasons that stop them from being self-driven and motivated to achieve. Critical design today is used commonly to raise awareness, make people think, challenge narrow assumptions and perceptions, uncover those assumptions, and provoke action. The research starts to look at lack of motivation and self-discovery, unlocking interests and strengths as individuals, then moves to examining individual, social, cultural, and traditional pressures that prevent Qatari female youth from developing the skills and characteristics required for self-driven, motivated lives. It aims to question and challenge the reality of Qatar's ability to push towards a possible future, such as Qatar's Vision 2030².

My experience suggests that many teenagers in Qatar have a hard time becoming independent individuals with goals and a passion to succeed. Today, many of the young Qatari females are disengaged from a purposeful life and seem to value superficial priorities that could promote shortsighted, immediate gratification. Qatar's leadership recognizes the need for action on the part of both society and youth to take ownership of Qatar's development and participate in it. As a result, the General Secretariat for Development Planning is issuing annual reports on the progress of the country in developing its youth, and among many of its initiatives is the United Nations' Programme of Action for Youth³ with emphasis on youths' civic participation⁴. Despite the numerous initiatives and opportunities that Qatar's leadership is offering and the support that it is providing for Qatari women to grow, such as developing Education City universities and providing full scholarships to attend some of the



Figure 2. Developing Qatar
Source: VCUQ Library
Photographer: Tammi Moe

² This is a list of development goals that aims at transferring Qatar into an advanced country by 2030.

³ A program integrating youth in the development process of the country.

⁴ Qatar National Advisory Committee, *Expanding the Capacities of Qatari Youth: Mainstreaming Young People in Development* (Doha, Qatar; General Secretariat for Development Planning, January 2012), 105.

best universities in the world in their own country, it is unfortunate to be experiencing the same social and cultural struggles that women have been faced with as in the years passed⁵.

It is apparent that social development is having a hard time keeping pace with the country's overall development. For example, there are still many families who do not believe that a university education is necessary for the Qatari female youth, who prohibit female youths' engaging in places that are coed, or who believe that women should not drive or work, and the list goes on⁶. Young Qatari females seem to settle on a lifestyle that might have been tailored for them by others or that just presented the easiest or only known option at the time. In my experiences, most of these people end up doing things routinely with little passion or drive, even later in their lives. One example, which seems common among the Qataris, is to show up at work in the morning to show their attendance and leave for the rest of the day. This illustrates the lack of interest and responsibility among them. Especially because more than half of Qatari people are under 20 years old⁷, without having people who are eager, self-driven, and motivated, Qatar will have a hard time reaching its 2030 vision. "Comprehensive development is our main goal in striving for the progress and prosperity of our people," according to Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar⁸. The problem then is, how do we prepare Qatari youth, and specifically females, in this project to participate and own this vision of progress and prosperity for Qatar that positions women as fully equal partners with men? In seeking an answer to this problem, this study also seeks to answer three key questions that lead the research, because as designers, through the design solution that we provide, we have the power to inspire and affect lives. 1. How can design, especially critical design, help female youth become individuals? 2. How can design challenge and provoke awareness, discussion, and action about narrow assumptions prevalent in Qatari society? 3. How could

5 The women's struggles in the Qatari society are many, any one of which is a large problem that this thesis does not intend to investigate, and the specific issues with which the study is concerned will be discussed later in the paper.

6 These issues are beyond the scope of this research.

7 Qatar National Advisory Committee, *Expanding the Capacities of Qatari Youth: Mainstreaming Young People in Development* (Doha, Qatar; General Secretariat for Development Planning, January 2012), III.

8 General Secretariat for Development Planning. *Qatar National Vision 2030*, (Doha, Qatar; General Secretariat for Development Planning, January 2012).

everyday objects function beyond their intended physical function to possibly impact female youths' individuality in Qatar?

b. JUSTIFICATION

In a booming country such as Qatar, one can observe, specifically among teenagers, a lack of local individuals who are eager, self-driven, and motivated. This could be more apparent at the youth level, and as they mature, some grow out of this phase; however, many do not. These qualities can diminish the access to elements of life that are culturally unique and innovative, that represent the authentic self of Qatar. Therefore, the country will have to rely on imported resources and expats, who will not be able to reflect the authentic values and culture of Qatar. Consequently, eager Qatari individuals become an important asset that can push Qatar, passionately, to achieve its vision.

However, the lack of curiosity and discovery seems to be a shortcoming among the youth in the evolving Qatar, bearing in mind its booming economy today. Perhaps the abundance of money, things, and opportunities, hand in hand with the social structure and traditional and cultural pressures, has blinded them from seeking the chances to look within themselves, and to discover their own desires and qualities. Idit Katz and Avi Assor show in their paper about the relationship between motivation and choice that abundant choice is not always the best option; however, it is important to be provided with choice only to the level that satisfies the psychological needs of youth⁹. The numerous opportunities in Qatar, such as too-many temporary satisfactory choices, could prevent the youth from gaining the strength to vigorously defend their goals in the face of cultural and social pressures. This could happen because often there is another, more socially acceptable option that one can adapt to but that may result in future disinterest in growth and ambition. It is evident to me in the modern Qatar today that female youth who more often experience cultural restrictions, give up on their desired goals and settle on options that they may not prefer because they are more accessible or have fewer cultural and social repercussions that are guaranteed by others. Female Qatari youth are more affected by this because Qatar is a male-dominant society in which the Qatari females enjoy fewer freedoms and less social power than the males.

9 Idit Katz and Avi Assor, "When Choice Motivates and When It Does Not." *Educational Psychology Review* 19 (2007): 429-442, accessed November 2012. doi 10.1007/s10648-006-9027.

In the Qatari culture, which is small and community-based, family and elderly are to be respected, and their thoughts and opinions are more highly valued than those of the young people. It is not respectful to argue with elders and develop an opposing opinion. I believe, based on personal observation, because of financial security and reputation in the small society, youth are not encouraged to express, experiment, try, fail, and achieve, and often they are told not to dream because they are incapable of achieving. As a result, they grow to fear individuality; rejection, especially social rejection; failing; and even success. "What is it that makes people persist in the face of failure? Those with low self-esteem and self-confidence are more likely to avoid being proactive and give up in the face of adversity."¹⁰ With the constant fear of failure, the reward of any accomplishment becomes monetary, selfish gain, or appeasement rather than self-satisfaction. Under such circumstances creativity becomes demoralized and minimized. Taylor Carman, who is Professor of Philosophy at Barnard College, Columbia University in the City of New York, argues that "We are thoroughly conditioned by the world we are in, and that world is a world of customs, tradition, practices that we are so immersed in that we can never see our way out of it. The only way to do anything skillfully, and with innovation, and with insight and sensitivity, and authentically is to be appropriating traditions, practices, customs that are around us in the world that we have just absorbed."¹¹ Therefore, it is important for the Qatari population to bring up independent, critical thinkers, who respect the past and envision an authentic, innovative, and advanced future rather than to add roadblocks, to becoming individuals, on the way of the Qatari female youth.

¹⁰ Donald Clark, *Games, motivation & learning*, Sunderland, UK: Caspian Learning, 2007.

¹¹ Tao Ruspoli, *Being in The World*. Directed by Tao Ruspoli. 2010. New York, NY: Mangusta Productions. DVD.

c. DELIMITATION

The study focuses on female Qatari youth between the ages of 15-19 and their everyday objects. It is a critical design project that showcases obstacles that the Qatari culture and society impose on their female youth, obstructing their becoming independent individuals. It aims to critique the society and its pressures to raise awareness, make people think, challenge narrow assumptions and perceptions, uncover those assumptions, provoke action, bring the issue to the youth and society in a seemingly humorous way. This helps the community to start thinking to create change in later stages to push the country towards its vision.

The research does not provide an answer or solution it asks questions. The Qatari society has many social issues that my research is not addressing. The project is not studying Qatari males or adults over the age of 19 or youth below 15. It is not a new object design, where it would be an elaboration on a design of an existing object. At this stage it is not to be mass-produced or distributed; rather, it is a prototype illustrating one way in which critical design can initiate a conversation to challenge a social occurrence.

3. Background and precedents

With Qatar's ambitious vision for 2030, the country needs passionately motivated people to uphold and propel the vision through their drive to be outstanding achievers. Qatar's national vision has four main pillars: human, social, environmental, and economic development. This research focuses on human development, which enables people to sustain a prosperous society. A part of this pillar that is closely relevant is the capable and motivated workforce. "The system will also encourage analytical and critical thinking, as well as creativity and innovation. It will promote social cohesion and respect for Qatari society's values and heritage, and will advocate for constructive interaction with other nations."¹² Social development is also relevant because it addresses the development of a just and caring society based on high moral standards, and capable of playing a significant role in the global partnership for development¹³.

Qatar is a small Muslim Arab country, which is ruled by the Al-Thani family. The current *Emir*, meaning "ruler", is Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. This is a fast-developing country that has one of the largest natural gas resources in the world and is considered one of the wealthiest countries per capita, focusing its powers on becoming a leading Arab country. Qatar has brought the finest education and colleges from around the world to educate the people. It provides tremendous education and scholarship for its citizens and many opportunities for the residents. It has set a vision for 2030 to develop with certain standards focusing on people, society, environment and economics. It has the largest Arabic broadcast news channel, Al-Jazeera, "one of the world's leading media corporations, encompassing news, documentary and sport channels."¹⁴ Qatar is a leading host for many sporting events, and they will be hosting the World Cup 2022. It is politically involved in bringing peace to the world and developing projects in countries in need. With all the development that is happening in

¹² General Secretariat for Development Planning, *Qatar National Vision 2030*, (Doha, Qatar: General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2008), 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ "About us," *Aljazeera*, accessed March 26, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/aboutus/>.



Figure 3. Qatar leadership
Painting in Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

all aspects of life, Qatar, with its small population, has become an international attraction because of its need for resources and work force to develop and achieve its goal.

Qatari society is a conservative, small community, and it is family-oriented. Because of its small population, most people know each other, and word of mouth gets around easily. Qatari cultures and traditions give more freedom and power to the men. Many things have changed for women in the past few years; however, the society's acceptance of such changes is slow. For example, the Emir's consort, H.H. Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser, has been a leading force on many of Qatar's civic, economic, educational, and political developments. When she first emerged as a strong female leader, who would work by the Emir's side in the local and international context, the community criticized her. However, through time with evidence of the great work H.H. Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser, has achieved, she has become an important role model for the Qatari and Arab world who has also become an international representative of Qatar.

The social development is finding it hard to keep pace. Overall, there are some social and cultural traditions and values in Qatar that can be revisited to better match the needs of modern Qatar. Examples of those are: wrong perceptions of some Islamic rules and behaviors; over-attention to public judgment; discrimination against gender, status, and tribes; and some other social issues that hold the society back while the country is developing in an extremely fast pace.

Qatar society with its male dominance has set social responsibilities, which the citizen needs to follow. The male role has been to provide and support the family financially, and the female role has been to take care of the home. Based on this traditional responsibility distribution, the society allocated social rights, such as education, to the male because his responsibility was to work to provide. On the other hand, the female did not necessarily need education based on her social responsibility because she handled the home. This has been the cultural model for many years. This life structure has changed over time, but the society continues to judge the female's actions, using the old values and rules. This resistance toward the growth of the female and her financial and social independence, is stopping female Qatari youth from fighting for their goals and passions in life beyond the social responsibilities that the society has set for them. Consequently, Qatari society



Figure 4. Qatari family
Source: VCUQ Library
Photographer: Tammi Moe

needs to keep pace with Qatar's development. This project intends to challenge these issues through the perspective of design.

Design is a new field in Qatar and has not been developed enough through the years; however, design in the world has reached a point where it is not only aesthetic but also it has become much more. Design can help societies understand complex matters in simpler ways, which is the core of this paper. Internationally, addressing complex matters through design has been named *critical design*. It is based on design thinking to tackle complex problems that are not necessarily aesthetically relevant. The design studio Dunne & Raby, who are one of the leading critical design thinkers, define critical design as "speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the role products play in everyday life. It is more of an attitude than anything else, a position rather than a method."¹⁵ This thesis will practice critical design using the everyday life context in Qatar to challenge society through design. Dunne & Raby have many critical design projects questioning science and future possibilities, and one of their most relevant projects to my thesis, which is critical objects commenting on Qatari society's hindering their female youth from becoming individuals, is titled *Do you want to replace the existing normal?* It critiques people's desires and the fact that design can follow those desires. If our desires stay unimaginative, that is what our objects will be. Among the few objects they created are: 1. *The Statistical Clock*, which checks the BBC website periodically for fatalities and broadcasts the number. 2. *Alignment*: A small pressure gauge indicates that it is operational. It could go off at any moment, spreading its contents into its surroundings. By reading the pattern of behavior of this machine, people can forecast events. 3. *The Risk Watch* speaks the safety risk level of the country that you are in when you place it next to your ear.

What is valuable to this project is that they have taken existing behaviors and concerns and reflected them in everyday objects, similar to the approach of this thesis. It is trying to look at the object not as its function but by using it as a medium to convey a greater message that is beyond the function or aesthetics of the object. Each of the three everyday objects designed by Dunne & Raby reflects a message beyond the function of the everyday object.

¹⁵ Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, "Critical Design FAQ," *Dunne & Raby*, accessed January 2013, <http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/projects/75/0>.

4. Investigation and methodology

This thesis incorporates an interdisciplinary research that includes both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through interviews, participatory observations, detached observation, and examination of physical artifacts. The literature reviewed in preparation for this thesis, looked at youth motivation, individual versus communal behaviors, family structure and its effects, society, fear, failure, philosophy of involvement in the world, and Qatar's national vision. The design solutions include both media and objects to understand existing designs and investigate the research questions that have affected youth either indirectly or directly.

The project begins with an investigation that incorporates field research in Qatar working with female youth through three exploratory experiments. The three exploratory experiments target three different individuals and groups: (A) one person based on a specific individual need, (B) a small group dynamic of peers, and (C) a larger audience in the society. This was the outline I started with, and as it progressed each experiment influenced and directed the next one. Through designing and exploring possible outcomes for each category, I understood the problem, and audience, better and carried the outcomes along the journey.

The data collection for this project has been a parallel process with the hands-on design investigation. This was a necessary choice for this project, because I needed to educate myself about the Qatari youth and investigate what has been done in the field along with dividing the problem into smaller and more treatable. This process depends hugely on the findings of each step and supporting materials and the background information one acquires along the way of this process. In this process thought triggers a question, a question leads to research, research to findings, findings to design, design to findings, and the process carries on in a fluid order. For example, the finding of the first experiment led to the second experiment, and the finding of both experiments led to the third, and the analyses of all of them led to the conclusion. Design has been used in this process as a result of research and in other cases in this research as a tool to collect data, which will become clearer while reading through the experiments.

a. RESEARCH THROUGH DESIGN GOALS, AND INTERVIEWS: IDENTIFYING THE PERSON FOR THE PROJECT.

The first design exploratory experiment was based on one person's individual needs, and only for that one individual. In order to identify the person I wanted to design for and collect information on the targeted group, I interviewed three girls of the ages of 17 and 18, who are in grades 10 and 12.

The question structure was semi-structured, and it focused on four main categories: personal interests and activities, family and friends, school, and Internet and social networks. In all the categories, they seemed somewhat emotionally disengaged and not interested in participating in life because nothing seemed to matter to them. These youth appeared unconcerned with future goals, whereas they seemed to be concerned with what is happening today, perhaps because their understanding of purpose in life varies from adults' perspective of purpose.¹⁶ The youths' understanding of purpose was about how much fun they could have today even if it has consequences tomorrow.

16 Patrick Hill, Anthony Burrow, Amanda Dell, Meghan Thornton, "Classifying Adolescents' Conception of Purpose in Life," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no.6 (November 2010): 466.

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These participants are Qataris and have a stable, comfortable life situation with certain life stability, which takes them out of the state of physical need. It appears that they never needed something to have to work hard towards. Observing them did not reveal a drive based on a need for life necessities, and they seem to lack that desire to have to do something. This lack of motivation could also be a result of not having such basic needs met as the sense of belonging, friendship, love, or the need to be a respected individual or self-actualization. These are essential to feel complete and valid in all aspects of self, to feel confident in being oneself based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Qatar is society-based, and individuality often could mean opposition to culture, and having different opinions could lead to rejection in the society. Youth are brought up with the constant fear of social rejection and failure, and as they grow these complex emotions could stop their dreaming or believing.

The three interviews demonstrated some common interests among the Qatari teenagers. There was a draw towards the Blackberry mobile phone and especially the BBM application, which is like a messenger that connects to the Blackberry mobiles for whom the user has the Blackberry PIN. This appears important to them because it is the primary way that they connect with their friends, who also seem to have an important role in their lives. Interestingly, they do not spend so much time online other than using the social networks. They do not even spend a lot of time on Twitter and Facebook, and some of them do not even have Facebook accounts. Twitter seems the more popular one but still not something that they are so interested in. Some mentioned they use Twitter to be updated with their friends and their lives; others just said that they just use it for "no good reason." Their social lives are very important to them. Gatherings, parties, and family play a big role in the way they live. They are constantly influenced and pressured by the society and how the society will accept them and their opinions. They also are affected by what they hear and what they say without critically evaluating this information. A couple of them are interested in becoming lawyers without even knowing the lawyer's responsibility or how to become one.

Amina Al-Heil's research written in Arabic, "*Studying the Logical Guiding Program: the Psychological Pressures on the High School Girls in Qatar*," illustrates that Qatar is a very community-based society and family has an important role in the future decisions and the daily



Figure 5. Interview analyses

lives of youth. Youth are expected to spend time with their family, often on a daily basis, because they have been brought up to value family and family time. The family controls many of the life expectations for female youth, such as where they can go, what they can do, and what they are going to become. Family has injected their perceptions and ideologies into them since they were children.¹⁷ For these reasons, Qatari youth may adopt the family's thoughts and perceptions, and even follow their parents' footsteps. Al-Heil states that the "Family pressure is the number one psychological pressure on the Qatari female youth in the Qatari families"¹⁸ where satisfying the family and their desires, even if on simple matters, becomes a priority. For example, sometimes not wanting to participate in family socials is unacceptable. The family thinks there must be something wrong with the individual, or she is being disrespectful, belittling tradition and reflecting a bad image of the family. Therefore, female Qatari youth easily may spend little time thinking about their own desires or on just reflecting on what happens in life. Most of their time is spent with family and friends finding common interests or common thoughts rather than thinking as an individual. In such families, conformity is embraced more than individuality, and girls are encouraged to be like other people. Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American essayist, lecturer, and poet, who led the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century, believed that too much conformity strips us from our most authentic, most human selves. What the bigger group views as "good" might not be good for the individual.¹⁹ It is clear the Qatari culture today is not comparable with the 19th century America, but no matter how collective and community-based is a culture, our individual needs and sensitivities vary; therefore, it is important in any society for females to have the opportunity to evaluate options with their own critical voice.

All of the interviewees had a close friend or a person whom they viewed as people they have to be in contact with on a daily basis. Interestingly, they were somewhat insecure about what they told their friends. A couple of them mentioned that they have different friends who know different parts of their lives, so they do not share everything with one



Figure 6. Interview analyses

person. Also, they mentioned that they do not like their friends to get to know each other, and one of them mentioned that she does not like her sisters to know her friends, too. I would think that it is probably because they act differently around each person or they do not trust their friends, or it might be even that they want to be accepted and not judged by those with whom they spend time, which illustrates the importance of peers and society's acceptance in Qatari culture. This desire to be accepted and fear of social rejection have informed my research questions and the need to address social pressure on youth.

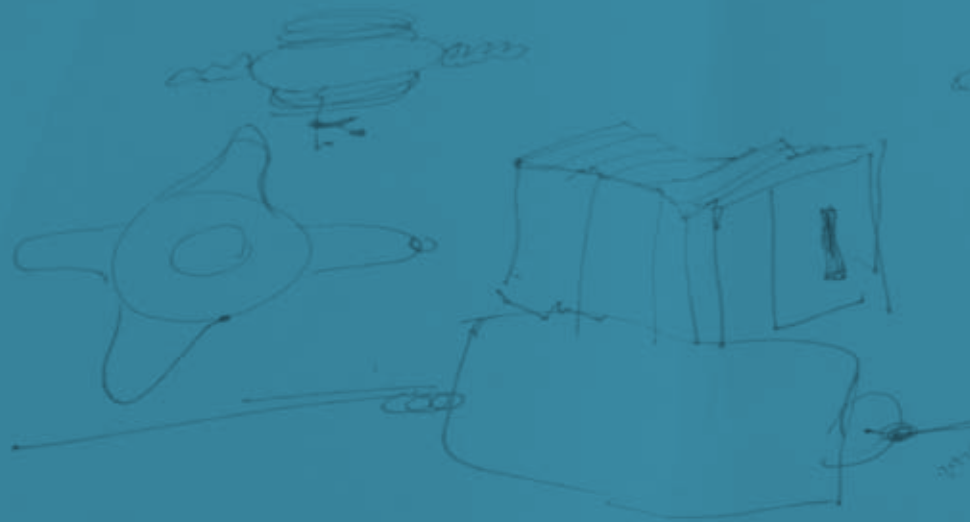
Commonly, all three teenagers viewed the house as a place where there is not much to do but sit with family, which, according to them, can become boring. They did not look at creating things for themselves to do in the house—instead they expected things to happen on their own. They want to go out every day; they want to spend time with their friends outside the house, go to malls, restaurants, and movies. It did not matter much what they do outside the house. It was all about getting out of the house even if there are no places to go and it is boring. This could result from the family pressures in the house and perhaps is a temporary escape mechanism that youth are adopting.

The participants showed interest in traveling, seeing new places, trying new things and having adventures. They were looking for freedom and wanted to live alone, yet they did not understand the responsibilities of that. They seemed like they are people who have not had many responsibilities in life to have to learn to be responsible and who do not understand the way life really works independently from parents and siblings. It also looks like they have not had many opportunities; therefore, it is the family's and society's responsibility to prepare them for life. They wanted independence, but they did not want to be alone, the company of others was valuable for them. In fact, they wanted to be able to do what they wanted to when they wanted to do it and to say what they want with no restrictions, like many teenagers around the world. These findings support and illustrate the importance of family's and society's roles and responsibilities in shaping the future of youth. At this point, it appears that not only are family and society not contributing to the future development of the youth but also they are diminishing youths' drive and thus hindering their progress.

¹⁷ Amina Al-Heil, "Studying the Logical Guiding Program: the Psychological Pressures on the High School Girls in Qatar" *Qatar University Research Journal* 13, no.26 (July 2004): 293.

¹⁸ Ibid, 297.

¹⁹ "Ralph Waldo Emerson on Individuality vs. Conformity," *West Chester University*, accessed December 2012, <http://brainstorm-services.com/wcu-2005/emerson-individuality.html>.



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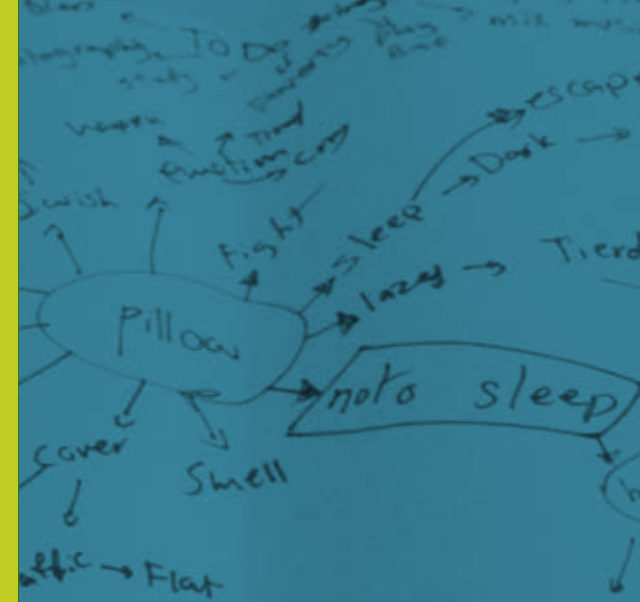
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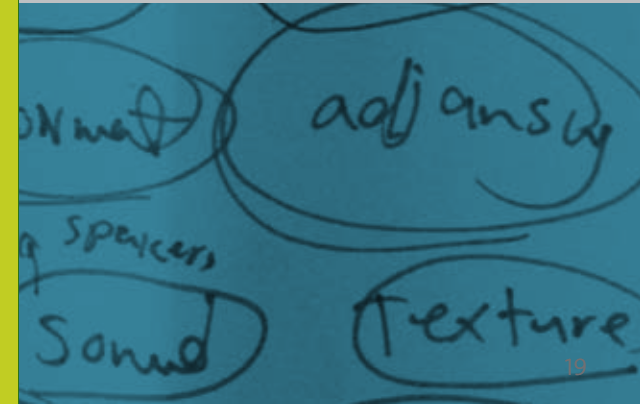
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b. EXPERIMENTING THROUGH DESIGN: THE INDIVIDUAL TARGET

The first experiment was based on the third youth's interview, intending to serve only this person and start questioning, because, unlike the other two, this subject had an interest in music, yet she did not consider it her life's direction. The design solution would need to motivate her to act on the interest she currently has, and to act on it more often. The subject was an 18-year-old girl in grade 12 who had started learning to play piano and guitar first from *YouTube* and moved to a teacher. She was proud of her musical achievement but did not share it with her friends, possibly being afraid that it might not be acceptable or might not have as much value to them.

One of the problems that I identified with her was that she had a lot of free time to sleep because she was taking only two classes in school. The goal in this project was to reduce her sleeping by distracting her with anything other than sleeping, because she slept more than required, perhaps out of boredom or as an escape mechanism from life. An interactive pillow, one of the objects most associated with sleeping, was designed based on four main musical actions of tapping, strumming, pulling, and pushing. The pillow was meant to be soft and comfortable yet fun. Different musical sounds and noise could be loaded into it. I used Arduino boards (an open-source electronics prototyping platform based on flexible, easy-to-use hardware and software) to create the technology-based interaction. The pillow was based on physical and digital interaction, so the hand movements of pulling and pushing directed the design of the pillow. Different samples were made to find the proportion for the physical interaction considering the function. The pillow design has a thread-like divider for the strumming and four divisions for the tapping. The physical design of the pillow was fun, and suggestive of movement.

This experiment demonstrated the possibility of designing for an individual, based on the investigation of their life and interests, to affect their approach towards that interest. Through this investigation, I also learned that the problem is not necessarily the lack of interest, but it can be their perception about the value and practicality of their interest. It raised the question of whether they have the personal skill set to evaluate and connect their interest to their future without the fear of social pressures and rejection.

Figure 7-1. Pillow Play

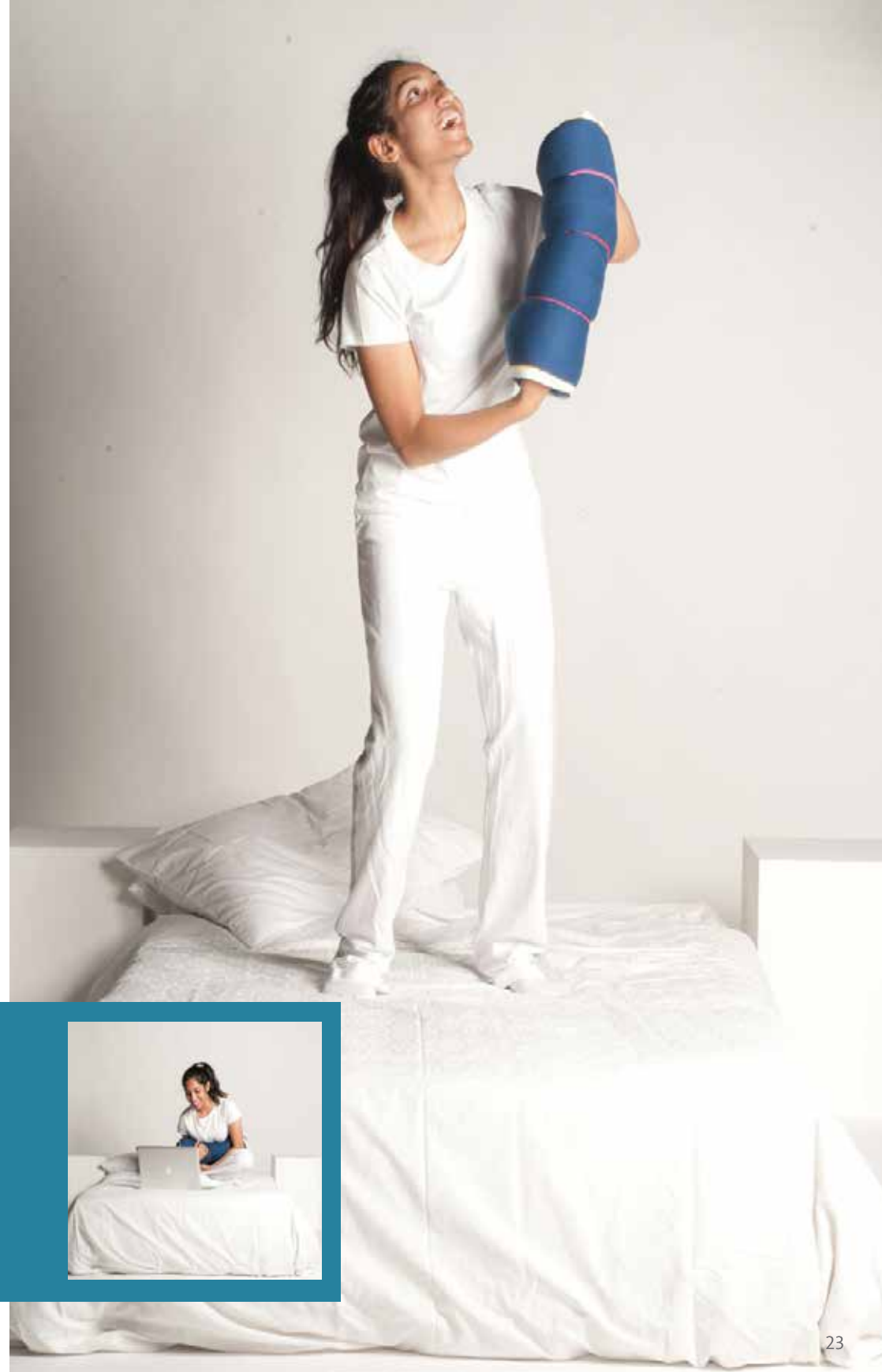


Figure 7-2. Pillow Play being used

c. RESEARCHING THROUGH FILM

While I was working on the design experiment, I watched a movie named *Harold and Maude*. It is the story of a 17-year-old boy obsessed with death, who attends funerals frequently, and commits fake suicides so often that his mother begins to ignore him. For instance, he poured red paint all over the bathroom, and he laid in the bathtub acting dead. All his attempts were very well staged with a high level of detail, which might reinforce the concept of Harold's attention need. Through the movie Maude, an older lady around 80 years old who attends funerals as well, notices him and tries to get through to him, until one day she offers him a ride in his own car, after she stole it. She is an adventurer who takes life easy and enjoys the little things in life. As they start spending more time together, and doing little fun things together, eventually they fall in love, and he learns to enjoy life. On her 80th birthday she tells him that she has taken pills to die, which was heartbreaking for him, but her response was that now

“Try something new each day. After all, we’re given life to find it out. It doesn’t last forever.”

he has learned what life is, and he can love because he has learned how to love and what love can bring to life. She dies, and he becomes so devastated that he drives recklessly to jump with the car over a cliff. The movie ends with Harold's watching the car sink from the top of the cliff²⁰. It is interesting to understand the reasons that made him choose life in relation to the Qatari youth.

What was interesting and inspiring to me in this movie is that Harold, the boy who was obsessed with death, chose to live, and start enjoying life. While watching this movie, I associated it with the life experiences and forms of joys that the Qatari youth experience. Harold's concept of attention, care, and love was close to the attitude of the teenagers I interviewed in Qatar. Not only did the movie make me question their life experience but also the level and kind of attention they get from families, schools or friends. Harold's use of extreme details and creativity in his call for attention is related to teenagers in that they may have the same problem of having their creativity and energy invested in the wrong things—possibly the only way to get attention from people, and the community. The extreme call for attention can also be a result of not being recognized for doing the right thing.

The movie also made me reflect on the concept of joy in life and wonder if I can create joyful experiences for this group through design. I want to help them appreciate life without being restricted to just satisfying other people. Possibly, design could arouse their interests in getting involved in life activities rather than attention seeking, and help them to make decisions, and create opinions and thought. On many levels this movie and reflection drove me to question what background skills may be required to overcome such situation. I determined a few important skills as a starting point: critical thinking, forming opinions, expressing thoughts, connecting events, and imagining.

20 Colin Higgins, *Harold and Maude*, directed by Hal Ashby (2000; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures), DVD.



Figure 8-1. Harold and Maude in the movie
Source: Harold and Maude,

<http://cinematicthoughts.blogspot.com/2012/11/harold-and-maude-1971-bud-cort-ruth.html>



Figure 8-2. Harold and his mother in the movie
Source: Harold and Maude,

<http://cinematicthoughts.blogspot.com/2012/11/harold-and-maude-1971-bud-cort-ruth.html>

d. RESEARCHING THROUGH POETRY

Another inspiration I came across while designing that started to make me think of this concept of joy and life was the Bruno Mars song *Life is Wonderful*, in which the lyrics speak about what actions and words require: “La la la la la life is wonderful . . . It takes a thought to make a word . . . And it takes a hole to make a mountain.”

It takes a crane to build a crane
It takes two floors to make a story
It takes an egg to make a hen
It takes a hen to make an egg²¹

The lyrics focus on the idea of background knowledge, and the need for life experiences, and skills to become motivated, think critically, and search for a direction in life. All these reflections made me think of the life experiences and struggles of life outside the home that most of these youth may not have had to overcome because they live such sheltered lives. However, how can we expect them to develop knowledge and wisdom without personal experience? How do we expect most young Qatari youth to care about anything when they can fairly easily have most monetary things they want or wish for? They have not had many responsibilities to act responsible; most have not been in need to have to think creatively of other solutions or even had to work hard to get something. In some cases they may have done that, but their lives did not rely on it. The Qatari and Middle Eastern society are societies that are based on the community and family structure, and sometimes the younger people are not encouraged to speak their minds and share their thoughts, especially in the presence of older people. Amina Al-Heil in her research, “*Studying the Logical Guiding Program: the Psychological Pressures on the High School Girls in Qatar*,” addresses “the cultural and social pressure on the female Qatari girl which limits her freedom of expression.”²² No matter what, they have to respect the opinions of their parents and older people. Such atmosphere does not encourage the young adults to create their own opinions of things around them and discuss their thoughts and opinions; consequently, they often consider their opinions invalid. To be able to create young adults who are strong and know what they want to do, how they want to do it and become motivated towards it, many characteristics

It takes a crane to build a crane
It takes two floors to make a story
It takes an egg to make a hen
It takes a hen to make an egg
There is no end to what I'm saying

It takes a thought to make a word
And it takes some words to make an action
It takes some work to make it work
It takes some good to make it hurt
It takes some bad for satisfaction

It takes a night to make it dawn
And it takes a day to make you yawn brother
And it takes some old to make you young
It takes some cold to know the sun
It takes the one to have the other

And it takes no time to fall in love
But it takes you years to know what love is
It takes some fears to make you trust
It takes those tears to make it rust
It takes the dust to have it polished

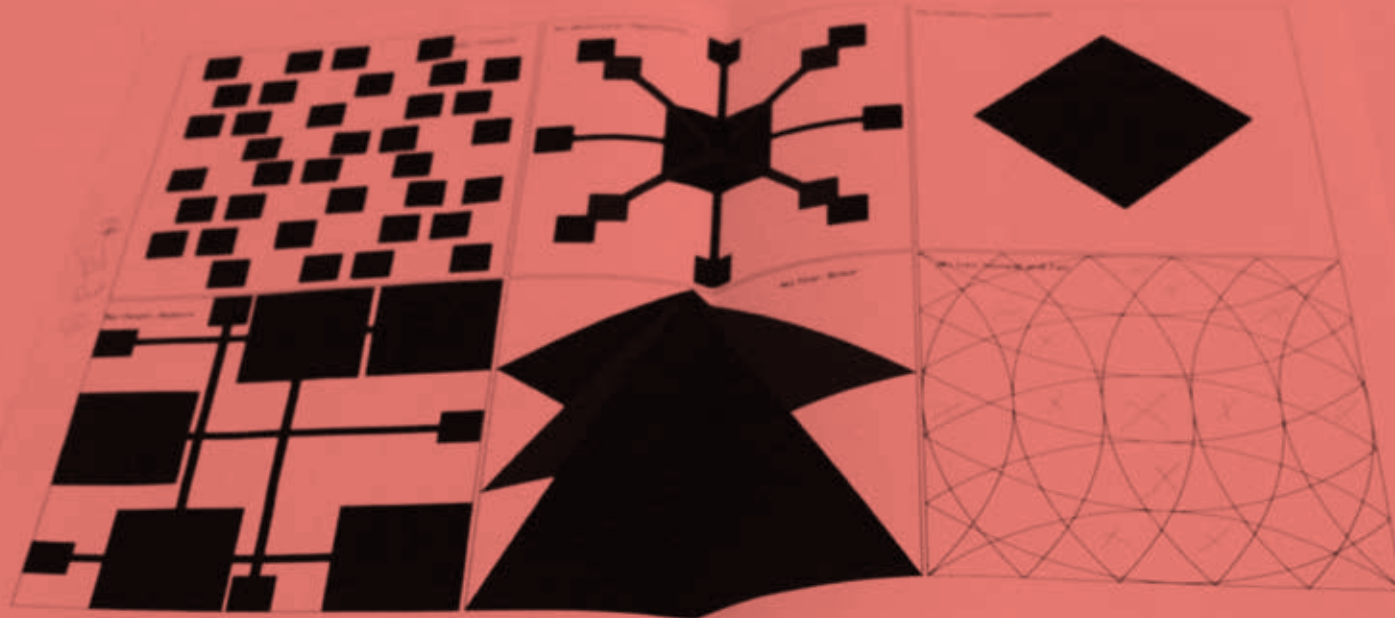
It takes some silence to make sound
It takes a loss before you found it
And it takes a road to go nowhere
It takes a toll to make you care
It takes a hole to make a mountain

are required, such as being able to generate a thought and an opinion and share them. Parents and family have a great role in enabling this characteristic, and researchers believe that youth need an adult who believes in their abilities even if they seem troubled. “Every person has an innate ability to reclaim his or her authentic self, to take personal ownership of one’s life.”²³

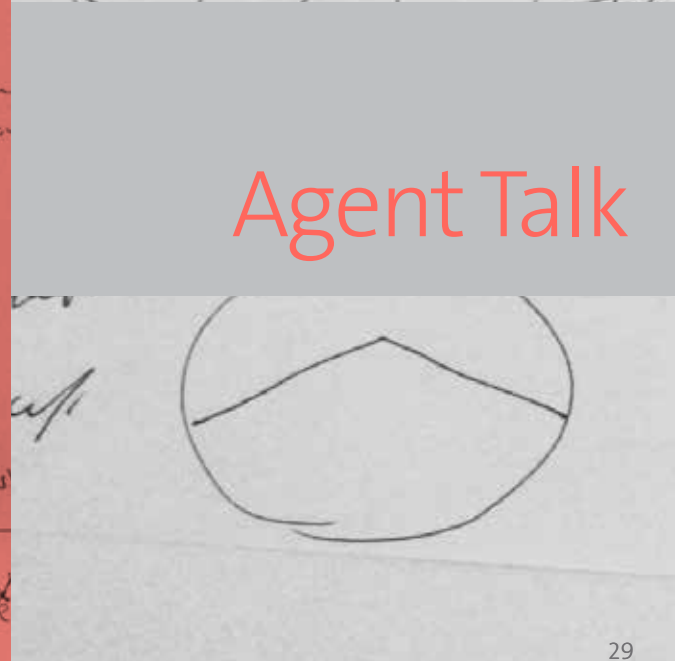
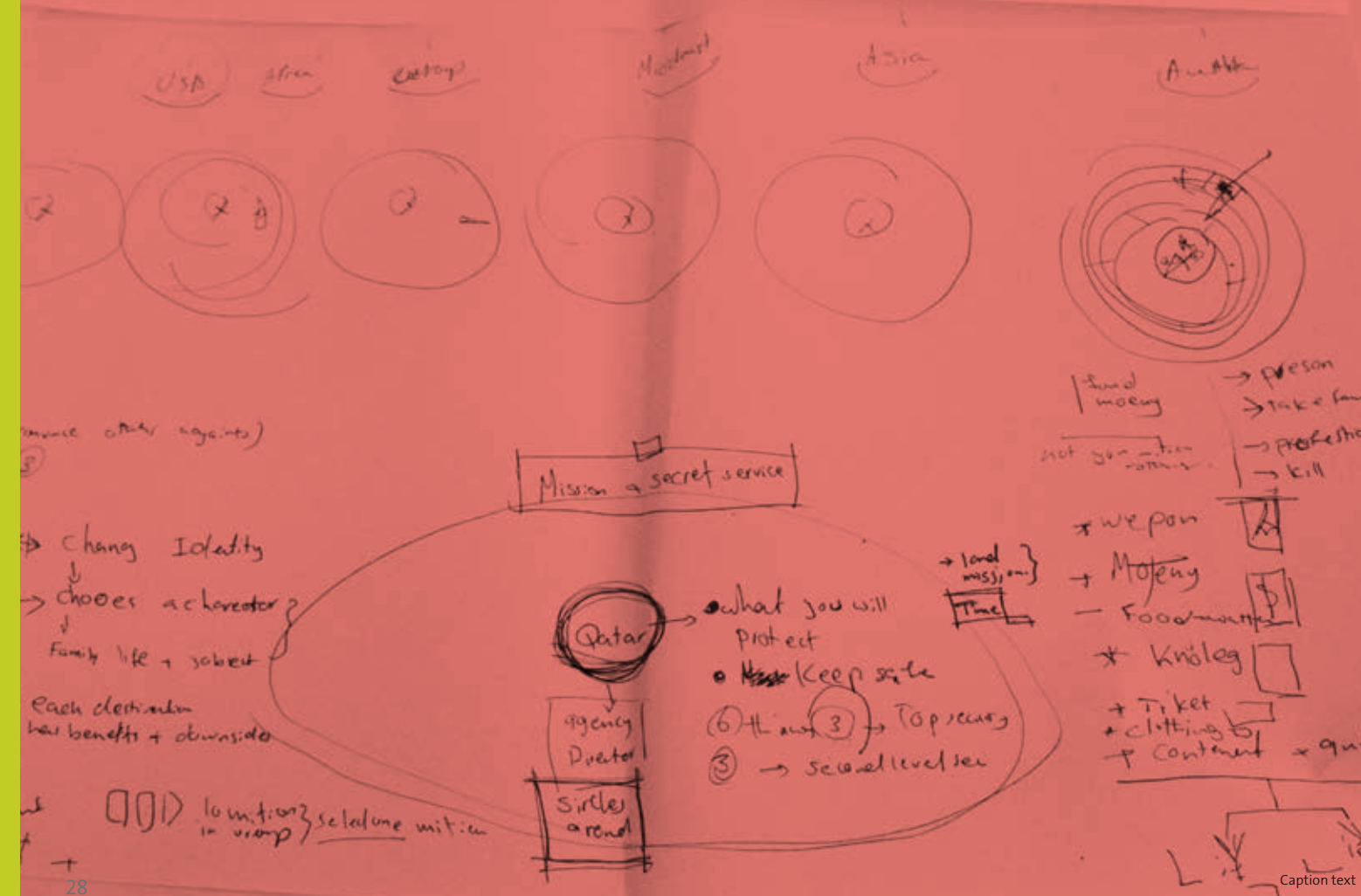
23 Sherwood Thompson, “The power of the parenthood in facing the future,” *Reclaiming children and youth* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2011):35, url: www.reclaimingjournal.com.

21 Jason Mrz, “Life is Wonderful.” Performed by Bruno Mars, *Metrolyrics*, October 2012, <http://www.metrolyrics.com/life-is-wonderful-lyrics-jason-mraz.html>.

22 Amina Al-Heil, “Studying the Logical Guiding Program: the Psychological Pressures on the High School Girls in Qatar” *Qatar University Research Journal* 13, no.26 (July 2004): P293.



Agent Talk



e. EXPERIMENTING THROUGH DESIGN: THE GROUP TARGET

These thoughts and the previous interviews led to my second experiment. Originally, I had planned that experiment two would involve a larger audience and possibly a class of students. Based on the new analyses and experiment one, I decided to design a game that would help Qatari female youth improve their background knowledge and skills required to become strong, motivated adults capable of discovery and searching. The skills I targeted in the game include giving their opinions, thinking and speaking their minds more often, making connections, and imagining. The goal of the second project became creating a platform for young female adults to discuss their thoughts and ideas, use imagination, make connections and decisions, and experience the consequences of those decisions.

I briefly interviewed a game creator in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Climate Change Center, Julie Arrighi, who is working in Disaster Management. More specifically, she is creating games about climate change and playing them with the communities to raise awareness. She mentioned that a good game will not fully reveal itself; it makes one think about it and perhaps even start other conversations and issues to be thought about. Julie stated the game should not give all the answers, should simplify

complex issues, and abstract them. Game design is a simpler approach to address large problems, as does critical design, to bring them to people. These social games are important because they allow us to know more about people, to get to know the opinion leaders in a group, and to discover their significance in the communities. The Red Cross and Red Crescent have been using games to educate and spread the word about the climate change; based on their research, it has been an effective way of education and passing on a message.²⁴

The game I have created likewise aims to train and develop specific skill sets while simultaneously providing me with research data. It is important that as the players become more proficient they can create their own missions, profiles, and rules to play with because it develops their critical thinking, imagination, and it gives the opportunity to bring an element of their lives into the game and perhaps take ownership of it. The game structure is based on the Qatari community, where the size of the community, their individual actions and decisions, can affect others. It also questions the community and the friends' support versus individual competition.

To get some basic ideas about designing games, and especially board games, I interviewed Levi Hammet, who is an assistant professor in the Graphic Design Department of Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCUQatar). Levi Hammet teaches a game design class. He expressed that the most important parts of game design are the mechanism, which is how the game works; the rules, which are the way it is played; the element of surprise, which adds interest; and the competition, which is the motivation or incentive that can be the concept of having fun. He also mentioned the importance of having a choice or options in the game.²⁵

Since adventure and travel have been an important part of the life experience for most Qatari, based on my previous interviews with them, I decided to create a game where players become secret agents who have to accomplish missions to keep the sense of mystery, adventure, and travel. This contributes to understanding how design can affect the youth.

²⁴ Julie Arrighi (Disaster Management, Red Cross and Red Crescent Climate Change Center), in discussion with the author, December 2012.

²⁵ Levi Hammet (Assistant professor in the Graphic Design Department, VCUQatar), in discussion with the author, October 2012.



Figure 9-1. Agent Talk



Figure 9-2. Agent Talk box

In the beginning players choose a profile for their undercover lives and missions. There are lands that are the destinations where they choose to go. Each destination has a set of missions to accomplish. The game intends to equip the youth with the skills required to become individuals to start thinking, expressing, imagining, and to keep interest in playing.

The medium in which they move forward toward the mission is a choice between two words. Once a word is chosen, the agent in play must convince the other agents about the benefit of the choice to the mission, by using their reasoning skills to connect the land characteristics, profile strength, and the end mission. There are six different destinations and a maximum of six players or six groups. These destinations are imaginary and play with concepts of life that seemed to matter to the young adults I interviewed previously.

One would play the game according to the following steps:

1. Select an undercover profile from profile cards, or one can create their own profile.
2. Select a land from the following:
 - a. No Death, a calm and relaxed land with many wealthy people; family, beauty and money matter.
 - b. No Fear, a land of support and no judgment; it is a land where failing is hard. It has a high population of hardworking people who are friendly and supportive.
 - c. No Lies, a poetic land with many writers and readers and much philosophical thinking.
 - d. No Rules, a very active and experimental population; strong, independent individuals who love and enjoy music.
 - e. No Obstacles, a warm land full of possibilities; it is about culture and history, art, love, romance, pleasure and nature, and the sea is a big part of this land.
 - f. No Predictions, a hard-working population who focus on the future; it is about digital inventions and science. It is a futuristic, high-tech land.

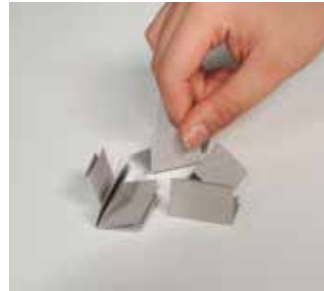


Figure 9-3. Agent Talk instructions



Figure 9-4. Agent Talk instructions

3. Draw a mission from the land; each land has its own missions that agents have to complete, and as the agents become more advanced they can create their own missions.
4. As agents complete a step towards the mission, they put a rock on the completed spot to be recognizable as complete, and the order of the steps is not important.
5. The agent in play must draw a card from the action cards, to connect their mission, profile, and land and to make connections by using their reasoning skills to convince other agents to permit the next action of the agent in play. At least half of the other agents must validate the answer of the agent in play, to enable forward movement.
6. The agent who finishes the twelve actions on their land first wins.

The game is complex, as demonstrated in the internal testing process. I planned to go into a high school to have students play it. Given that the game was complex, there was the fear that it may be difficult and might not give the result required. The process of getting into a school is not easy, and I needed to take advantage of being given permission to conduct a focus group. Consequently, I needed to maximize the chances of collecting valuable data and feedback. Therefore, I created a back-up game to start a conversation and warm up. I created a much simpler game that would help me get some data and information about the young adults in the high school, learn about their instant thought, and things they interact with on a daily basis.

The backup game I created is a simple card game that has three parts: objects, nouns, and verbs. The cards contain either a picture of an object, a noun to create a sentence, or a verb to say how an action is performed. There are also some empty cards for the students to draw an object or write a noun or a verb from their own lives and interests to incorporate into the game. The students have ten seconds to complete the sentence. This game is played with a large group of students in the classroom. The results of this game give an idea about the students' thoughts and the objects which they interact with most, and simply helps me to become acquainted with them. The value of the backup game is twofold: first, it breaks the ice among students and myself, and second, it reveals to me the everyday objects that are important to Qatari female youth and most used by them.

لا تنبؤات
لا قوانين
لا عوائق
لا موت
لا خوف
لا كذب



Figure 9-5. Agent Talk



Figure 9-6. Agent Talk being used

f. RESEARCHING THROUGH FOCUS GROUPS: THE GROUP TARGET

The next step after creating these two games was field study and a trip to a high school to try the games, see the results, and students' interaction with them. I organized a visit with two schools to play the games.

The first school I visited was Al-Bayyan High School, where I got the chance to play only the backup game with just one class of grade ten. I had the class for about 40 minutes; I started by explaining the game and their confidentiality rights. Then I gave them the cards to fill in their own words and objects. We started the game, and the students were very excited and interested to play it because it was a novel, in-school experience. At first there were many mundane answers such as, "I like this!" "I do this everyday!" Not all of these answers were completely true because their non-verbal behavior suggested that. So as we played, I created other rules, such as they could not repeat a sentence that had been said, or say "I like." It also helped that I would sometimes follow their answers with questions about their quick statements, such as, "Why?" "How?" "When?" Then I started getting better sentences that were more relevant to my research. Overall, most of the students were excited and took part in the game actively.

I played this game with another class in Umm-Ayman High School, with the students in the 11th grade, and this time I made a small change: the students were required to sit in a circle. This change made them more involved at all times. This group was so excited about the game that half of the class would count the ten seconds loudly, and the energy of the room went higher.

From this game in both schools, which was played by about 50 students, I collected the following repetitious objects and words from the empty cards on which the students drew an object or wrote a verb from their own lives and interests to incorporate into the game:

- Nine times students referred to *make up*; twice it was specifically *lipstick*, and twice it was *nail polish*.
- Eight times they referred to *books* and *notebooks*.
- Five times they referred to *watch*.
- Five times they used *shoes*, and four of those were specifically *heels*.
- Four times, *food*.
- Three times, *bags*.
- Three times, *pencils*.
- Twice they referred to each of the following: *blackberry*, *iPad*, *fashion*, *perfume*, *water*, *rings*.

These results gave me an idea of what are the most common everyday objects they interact with that come quickly to their minds, which led the research further in that direction.

The main game, which I titled, "Agent Talk," I only played in Umm-Ayman High School in the library twice, first with six students in the 11th grade. During the first round they were beginning to understand the game, and starting from the second round they were speaking and getting involved in the game. Surprisingly, it was not as difficult for them as I expected; they were connecting the three main components of land, mission goal, and profile with what the action cards threw at them to create something more related to their mission. As they played more, it was clear that they were getting more comfortable with the game, and their answers were more creative and cohesive.

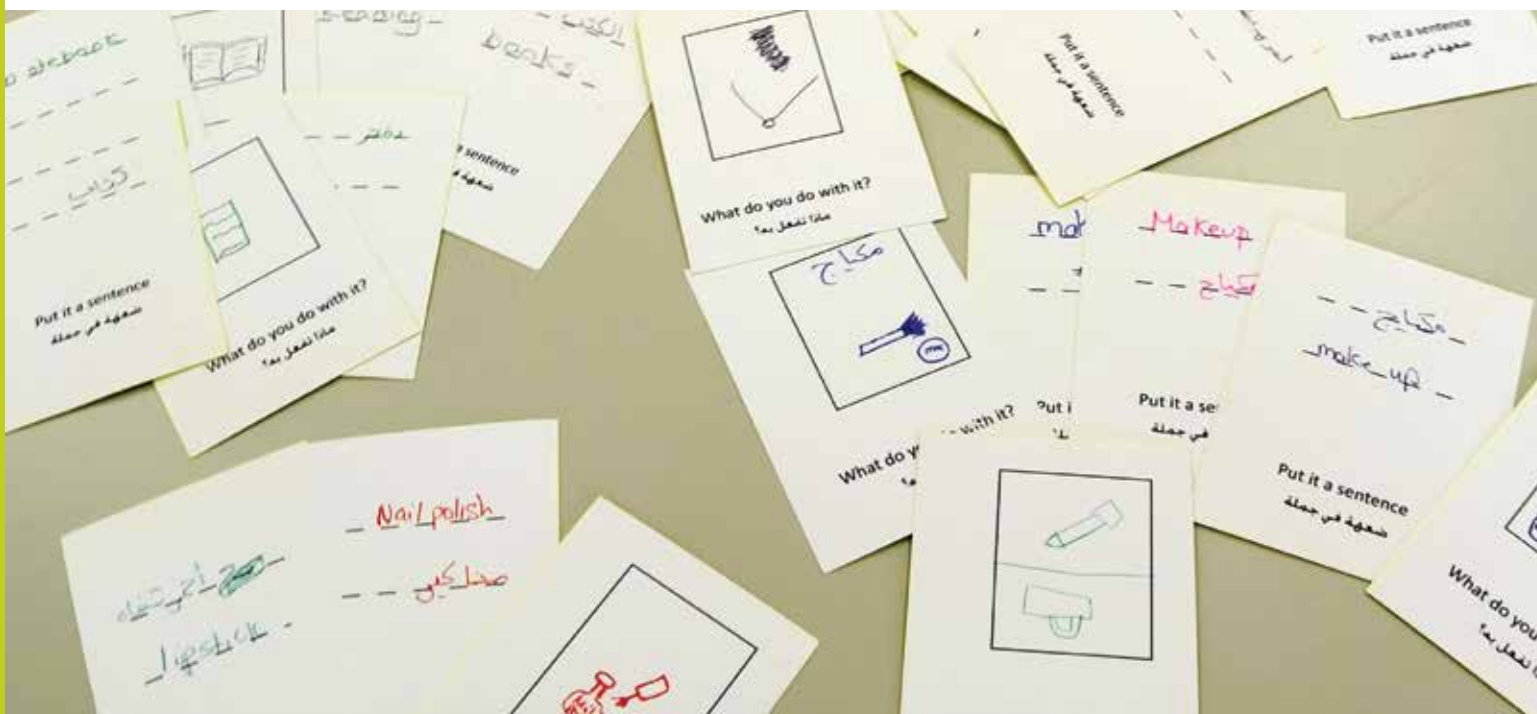


Figure 10. Card game outcomes



Figure 11. Agent Talk being played in the high school

"نبي المدرسات
يحترمونا و ما
يصارخون علينا"

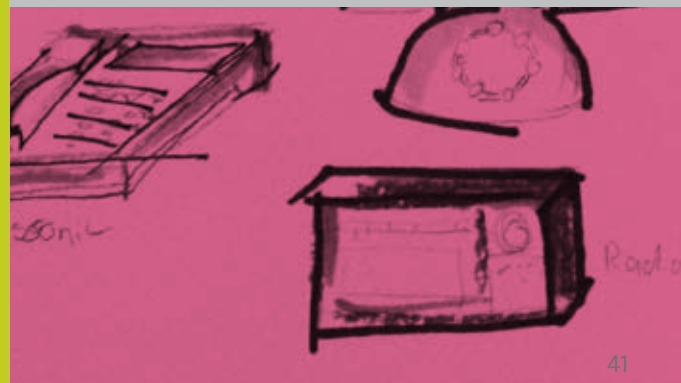
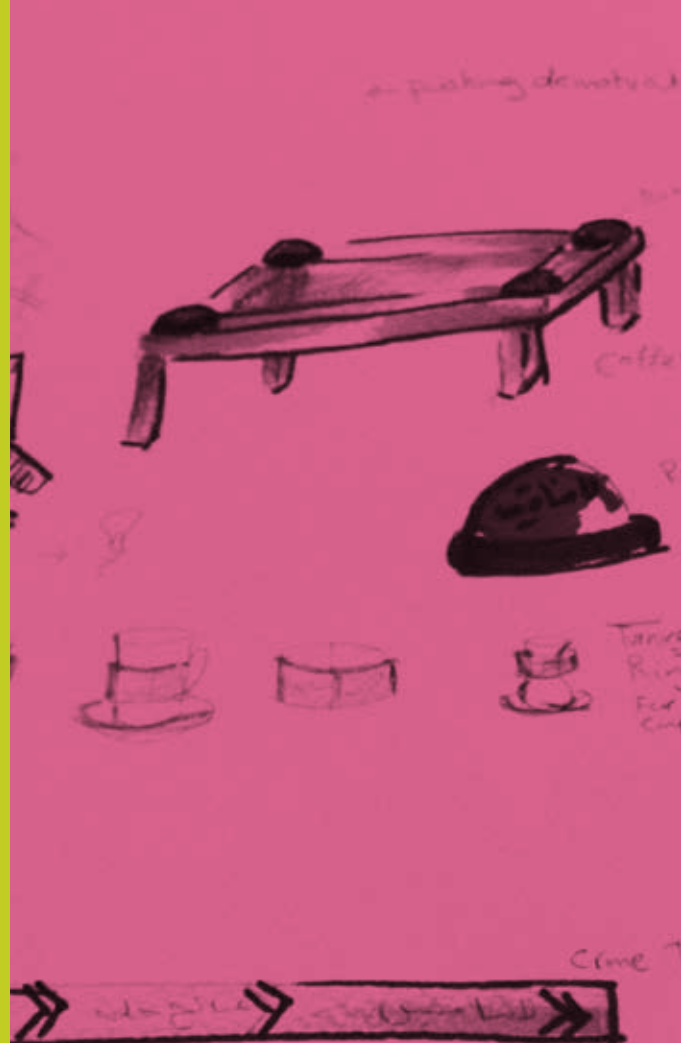
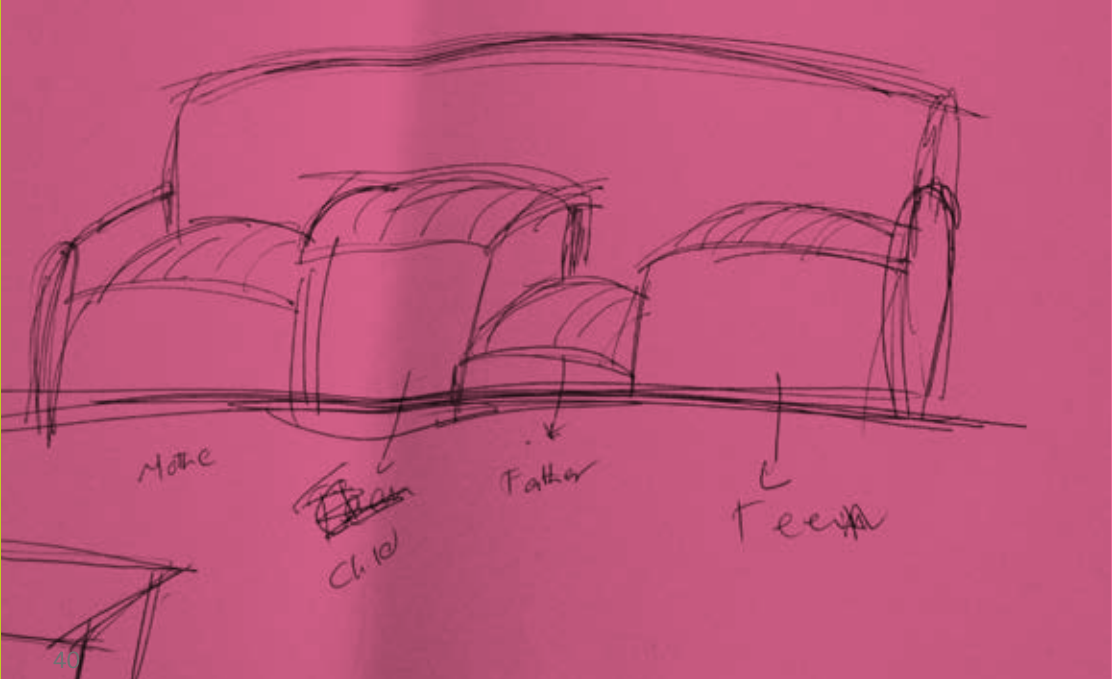
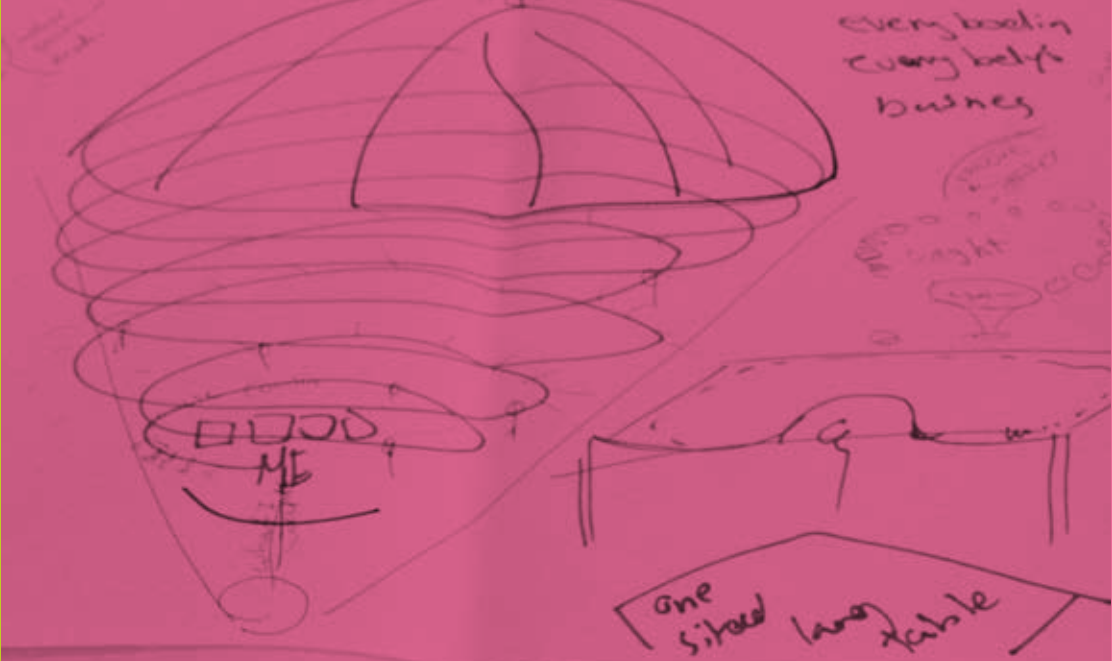
A second group overheard our conversation in the game, and they were interested to play the game, so they asked for permission to come and play it. This time we played with three people. Similarly to the other group, the first round was a warm-up round, and as we played more they started to get more involved and imaginative.

In both groups who played the game it was remarkable, considering the short time, that at the beginning they started with little imagination and had a hard time connecting the main components of the game. However, as they played more they became more involved and made up wilder responses and achieved convincing the other agents. An important observation was they were genuinely getting convinced by each other's answers, not just saying, "I am not convinced" so the other agent would not win. In some instances, they would help each other and give tips.

Playing with both groups, I noticed that the students were afraid of making mistakes and somewhat lacked confidence because there was a lot of hesitation before they answered or said anything. They waited to be given the answers and looked for people to help them rather than started thinking and trying to find the answers themselves. The fear of being wrong was apparent in this context and is relevant to the theory of self-worth, which states that in certain situations youth deliberately withhold effort

because they fear failure.²⁶ In this case, they helped each other to move forward and achieve their goals. A few of them actually wanted to prove themselves by answering correctly the next time, and they had the attitude that *next time I will impress you, and I will get it right*. They wanted to try new things and were interested to participate in activities. They were drawn towards the younger profiles for their undercover lives; also, the picture on the profile card was significant to their decision. They understood physical beauty and good looks as a tool that could be used towards their mission, as it was mentioned during the game. As they played more, they also started to use symbolism in relation to the word that came up, which was interesting to me because I had not considered it. For example, they understood the "black or white" from the action cards as signifying moral character rather than just a color. They were also keen on studying the issues rather than diving into them, which might have been the result of their fear of making mistakes or failing. They saw value in collaboration and involving the community in their solutions. They also believed in the emotional pain as a much more difficult thing than physical pain. They believed that friends could be less judgmental than family; therefore, they may be more helpful in certain situations: "The friends would not rat you out, but family in every matter would say this is not possible like this, or you shouldn't do this."

²⁶ Ahmad Al-Baker, Hanan Khan, Shaikha Al-Misnad, "Factors that Discriminate Best between Students Identified as Motivated or Not-Motivated to Achieve Academically," *Educational Research and Review* 3, no 4, (2008): 128, accessed November 2012, <http://www.academicjournals.org/ERR>.



The Other's Voice

g. RESEARCHING THROUGH CRITICAL DESIGN: CREATING CONVERSATION AMONG THE COMMUNITY

In the experiment after the game design, the social and cultural pressures on the youth were much more clear to me. After visiting two high schools and spending more time with the students, it was clear that their becoming individuals highly depends on family and society. The starting point was the family, and the context was home. Based on the research and interviews I have conducted, family seems one of the most important parts of the youths' lives. Living in a Qatari home, young adults need parental permission to get what they want or have to get their approval. In many cases the family does not permit them to do what they want for various reasons, and sometimes for no reason. I focused on three of the more significant complaints, because of their commonality: the home demotivates them through gender difference and favoritism, receiving orders with no reason given for them, and involving society's perception and how people may perceive the parents or family if they allow their daughter to do what she wants. In short, they are *authority*, *gender difference*, and *social judgment*.

The project critically questions these demotivators created by the Qatari families through three objects (a tissue box, a chair cover, and a box-shaped speaking side table) that could be placed at home where the discussion about getting approval happen. In the Qatari society there are many well-known sayings and slang statements that are commonly heard from the parents, which have become recognizable among the community. I collected a list of these statements through Blackberry messenger, asking 20 girls, 17-26 years old, what are the statements they hear commonly from their families regarding their ambitions and things they want to do. I got many responses immediately, and it seemed to be an interesting topic for the girls; many of the statements were the same or similar to each other in meaning, too. This shows the importance and role of the family in the growth of the daughters.



Figure 12-1. Laa' tissue

These results were used in the authority and reasoning part of the project. I created a black wooden tissue box, containing tissues, with those statements laser-engraved on them in Arabic the same way they are said. Basically, this tissue box, Named Laa' could replace the negative statement from the parents, and it did not matter which statement the user pulled from the box: all the statements were either, "*No, means No*" or negative sayings, such as, "You are not in need of it," "Close this topic, lock it, take the key and throw it in the sea," and "Hit the bottom of the well." These statements represent the common answers that the youth receive from their parents in response to many different issues. The tissue box looks like a reusable box normally placed in someone's living room; however, they cannot refill it once the tissues are finished, referring to the notion that maybe the young adult will have to go through this phase, and maybe such sayings will stop them temporarily. However, at some point the phase finishes, and/or they have to end it and eliminate the demotivational statements and move forward. As J.K. Rowling mentioned in the graduation address she gave at Harvard in 2008, "There is an expiry date on blaming your parents for steering you in the wrong direction."²⁷

27 J.K. Rowling, "The Fringe Benefits of Failure, and the Importance of Imagination" (commencement speech, Harvard University, Boston, MA, 2008).

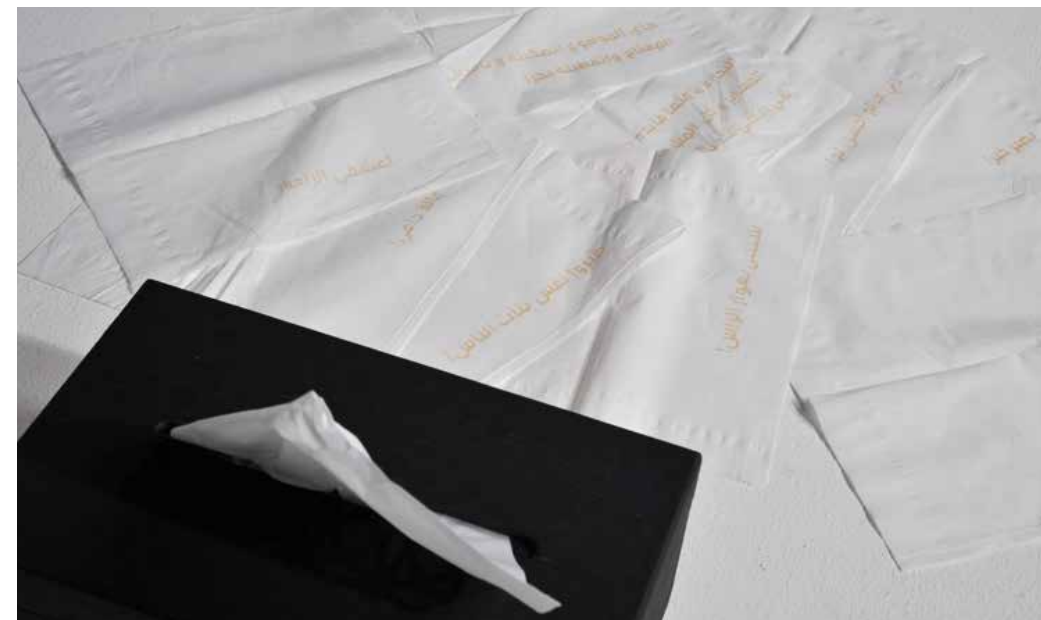


Figure 12-2. Laa' tissue box

This is important for the youth to understand that they can have some power over their destiny and can take control of some of the external influences in their lives.

The second object is a chair cover that comments on the gender favoritism in the family and the fact that, *simply because he is a boy*, the son can do whatever he wants without question, versus daughters, who cannot do anything freely. The chair cover is *Besht*-like, which is a men's formal dress for events in Qatar, to comment on the notion that if the girl were a boy, she may have a better chance of achieving her goal with fewer obstacles. The chair cover works on the commonly used chair in Qatar, so when the female wants to speak to her family she would use it and wear the *Besht* part of the cover. This is an ironic situation not supported by any current logic in the Qatari culture. It is an object that raises a question and challenges a social discrimination, starts discussion, and challenges family thoughts about the reason why they treat the male and the female differently. The chair cover loudly and publicly asks the question: *what must I do to secure the same treatment from my parents as my brother?*



Figure 12-3. Besht chair cover front



Figure 12-4. Besht chair cover back



Figure 12-5. Aggara speaking box interior

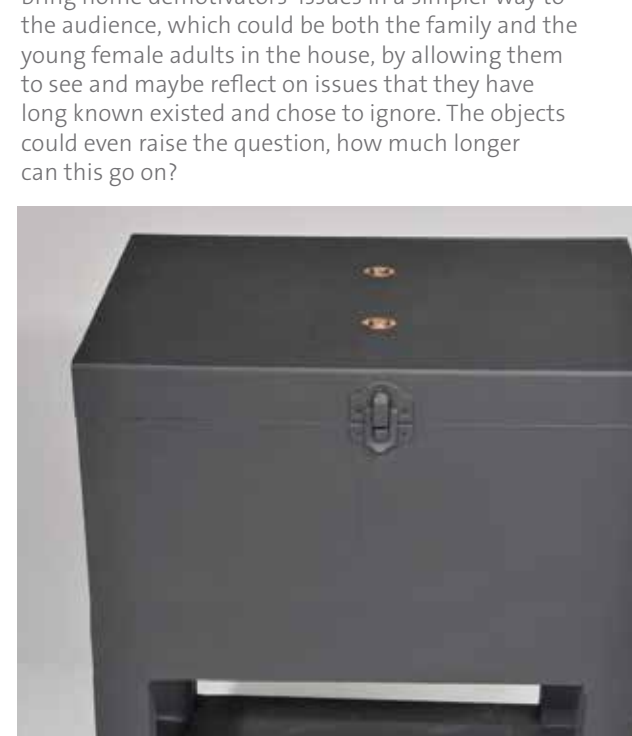


Figure 12-6. Aggara speaking box exterior

The third object comments on the people's opinions and the fact that some people will talk about other people's families. No matter what other people will do, some people talk about it, and it is the girls' and their families' choice to let that stop them from achieving what they want. I created a box that could function as a side table in the living room settings. This is a speaking device that reports people's opinions about the daughter's request; these speaking statements are from people talking with each other about other people's daughters in matters that are *none of their business*. By pressing on the button, the family allows other people's random intrusion into their own decision. The box resembles a storage box for valuable things, and in this case the people talk about people's daughters and what they do. When the box is opened, nothing shows of the mechanism through which the device speaks, but there is a precious gold hammer sitting in the empty box. The box offers the family the choice of validating the words of society, deciding to move on, ignoring the talks, or even breaking the speaking box with the golden hammer conveniently provided to possibly get past social judgment, without the intrusion of others who are not relevant to your life.

This project allowed me to critically and ironically bring home demotivators' issues in a simpler way to the audience, which could be both the family and the young female adults in the house, by allowing them to see and maybe reflect on issues that they have long known existed and chose to ignore. The objects could even raise the question, how much longer can this go on?



Figure 12-7. Besht chair cover being used



Figure 12-8. Aggara speaking box being used

5. Focusing the project through analysis

This research looks at understanding basic human interaction with the objects around us, in a different perspective, as they become an essential extension of who we are, and how we identify ourselves and engage with life. It is important to look deeper into motivation and what people could become motivated towards, which could be what they are good at and what they enjoy doing. In order to discover those strengths, one needs to be constantly involved in life and actively searching and participating. It is important to Do, Search, Want, Desire. The study has moved from focusing on motivation to the drive behind motivation. This study is premised on the argument that self-discovery, including awareness of one's strength, could motivate people to act on their strength. By studying Qatari female youth, my research showed elements that stop youth from this interest and discovery drive. Therefore, it is important, especially for youth, to have a safe space in which these can be explored and expressed. However, in the Qatari society this space is not developed, and the social life and culture add on pressures that restrict Qatari female youth from achieving. These imposed restrictions seem to have become a normal part of the Qatari society. Therefore, this project intends to question the social and cultural pressures through the expressive everyday objects of the Qatari female youth to stimulate discussion about them and communicate to society.

Being in the world: a philosophical guide to a meaningful life is a documentary, by Tao Ruspoli, that discusses how people engage with objects and the world around them, how they make sense of what is going on, and what their role in life is, i.e., what gives meaning to our individual lives. For example the documentary shows how a carpenter, through the tools he uses, can participate in the world and make sense of his surroundings. Qatari female youth need time and free space to make sense of their lives and roles. This could potentially emphasize the importance of individuality versus conformity to society. Heidegger, the German philosopher, challenged traditional philosophy beliefs by saying that Platonic realism has the story backwards. The most important thing about us is not that we can sit back and think, but it is that we can become involved in the world and develop skills for acting in the world,

thinking
analyzing
connecting

which may not be very intellectual, but it is practical. People learn skills and when asked how they are done, they need to demonstrate them because they cannot express exactly how they are done. In reality, this is how we think of talent or a gift: one cannot explain how it came to be a gift or how we are good at something. It means that we have reached the perfection level in doing that thing that we were taught to do at some point, and we have become so fully involved in it that we have mastered it, and it has become who we are and part of us. Therefore, we perceive ourselves as it and it as part of us without realizing how this happened. Objects become valuable, and we become connected to objects that help us to achieve what we are about. That specific object does not mean the same thing to everyone, and its value varies from one person to another. The object becomes the way of engagement in the world as an extension of the self so that one no longer thinks about it or how to interact with it. It becomes the way one connects to the world without thinking at all or analyzing the activity they are involved in. The mind is a complex thing. What triggers and interests each individual is different, and there is no clear rule for it.²⁸

Growing up in a society such as Qatar, the everyday objects, as Heidegger explains and elaborates, have “become who we are and part of us. Therefore, we perceive ourselves as . . . [them and them] as part of us without realizing how this happened.” This statement perfectly reflects the Qatari social structure—if we think of the society as the “object”—that has become part of us, thinking about its multifaceted pressures, internal and external, on Qatari youth. This project seeks to illustrate, through everyday objects, that society has become so much a part of its members' lives that they have been blinded by it, believing it is an extension of self without being able to tell the two apart. I also believe objects not only are an extension of self, as Heidegger describes, but also a way of social self-expression and communication with the society. These objects reflect one's personality, wealth, interest, opinions, and social status.

²⁸ Tao Ruspoli, *Being in The World*, directed by Tao Ruspoli (2010; New York, NY: Mangusta Productions), DVD.

6. The concluding thesis project

My research started with investigating the possibility of motivating the female Qatari youth to find their passionate ambitions; however, through my readings, field research and experiments, it has become apparent to me that the youth must *want* to participate and discover, and perhaps experiment and explore to find their passion, independent of the fear of failure or rejections in society. In order to achieve this participation, curiosity, and critical point of view, they should be aware of the surroundings and perhaps prepared by family, school, and society to develop the skills required for it. It might be even more relevant to say they must have a safe space to experiment, fail, and express themselves in order to discover their strengths and weaknesses and understand their qualities to get involved in the world. The documentary film *Being in The World* makes a clear point that there are things we do without thinking about them. According to the documentary, people go into the world and work with physical objects, interact with them, and live their daily lives. Some people seem to connect to themselves through connecting with objects and daily actions in life. The way the object makes people feel is extremely important²⁹. This thesis project seeks to create objects that could create conflicting emotions to push towards change. Also, it questions and challenges values, beliefs, and possibly could inspire action for Qatari female youth, through the design language of everyday objects, to become individuals who instigate the discussion required to liberate society and individuals from culturally imposed blindness.

Based on the research through the three exploratory design projects explained in the methodology section, “Experimenting through design,” I have taken the strength of each project to proceed with my final project. The strengths include the following as core components: elaboration on everyday objects; critical design; and objects that critique social judgments, authority, gender differences that hinder Qatari female youth from becoming individuals.

Starting from there, I am looking at the objects that Qatari female youth use the most in their daily

lives. The objects include shoes, bags, watches, makeup, and accessories, which are part of their self-expression and indirect communication with other people. Through critical design, the issues of authority, gender difference and social judgment in Qatari families and society will be raised and challenged.

Through the year of research, I have been searching for the core of the problem. When I started, it was apparent to me that there was a shortcoming, mainly from the youth, in actively and realistically planning for their future and becoming individuals. The more I engaged with the research and the more I understood the circumstances, it became apparent that youth are not the only party to blame. In a typical Qatari family, there are many forces that can affect the young adult while growing up in shaping their character, for example the family’s education level, livelihoods, social status, and wealth. Qatari society, like many developing countries, is a male-dominant society. From many years back the social structures have been set around that, where the society has distributed social responsibilities between genders. Generally, male social responsibility is to lead, and provide for the family, and female social responsibility is to follow the orders and take care of the house. Therefore, based on the social responsibilities set by the society in the past, the social rights are distributed. The male is entitled to many things in life based on social right, which are defined by his responsibilities. He has more power and since he is providing for the family, society grants him abundant rights. On the other hand, the female does not really need many rights based on her responsibilities at home. Almost always, crossing the boundaries of social responsibility is unacceptable. Today, in the twenty-first century the needs and responsibilities are not exactly the same as they were in the past; however, the social perceptions and the acceptance are still living in the past. Therefore, female youth are judged and brought up with those dated perceptions and beliefs. This makes the female youths’ journey of becoming individuals significantly distorted by those injected thoughts from the past.

As a result of adopting these perceptions as they are without reasoning and questioning their application to our modern world, we can clearly observe the lack of the safe space in the Qatari society for the female youth to dream, think, hope, express, try, and become individuals. This was especially apparent to me when I visited the high schools in Qatar and had interviews with the youth; they constantly expressed the lack of this kind of space and feared rejection

29 Tao Ruspoli, *Being in The World*, directed by Tao Ruspoli (2010; New York, NY: Mangusta Productions), DVD.

and being wrong. Especially in Qatari society, this estranges them from those who should create their safest spaces to dream, think, hope, express, try, and become individuals.

In the Qatari society female youth are challenged by the social structure because it enforces the importance of social acceptance, family value, and male dominance. The societal structure grants the family authority in making decisions for the female youth. These decisions are often affected by the social structure and the perceived socially acceptable behaviors, values, and what actions one can take. I am specifically critiquing society's perception through critical design objects to communicate issues of social judgment and expectation, family authority, and gender favoritism in Qatar.

These are the issues that hinder the growth of the Qatari youth. Therefore, I am creating a collection of personal objects that critically look at them. These objects will be communicating the issues not only to the youth but also to the families and the society. I am redesigning objects, such as shoes and accessories, to not only function as objects but also to communicate a message in a new way. This is the first step in facing the problem, and admitting that there is a problem by questioning the current situations, which is the extent of this research project.

The following are the objects that metaphorically represent the concept behind each one of them:

1. Gold earrings with precious stones that work as an earplug to stop the female Qatari youth's hearing social judgment. The size, placement, and diamonds effectively call attention and raise a question about the unusual placement. The concept acts as a metaphor about protecting the person from the "hurtful noises" of the society.
2. A set of gold finger caps, each with a small, dark diamond, that seats on the ends of the fingers to visually equalize their length. The jewelry pieces reflect the concept of social expectation to be similar to ones peers, without standing out, which discourages individuality and leadership. This illustrates the effect of distorting similar things into sameness, in the same way that the society tries to push the female youth to be the same. The effect of such force is clearly disturbing the original function of the fingers the same way it would affect a society full of conforming females.



Figure 13. Project 2 creation process

3. A gold and diamond watch that glows 12 times, calling for attention, when it strikes 12. The number 12 symbolizes the 12 grades of precollege education, immediately after which the girls are socially expected to marry. By that time they are not only socially prepared to marry, but they are also psychologically convinced that it is the time for marriage when it does not have to be.
4. A glittery black shoe with gold decoration, which automatically tweets braggingly about itself while being worn outside. By doing this, it alerts family and society to take notice of its actions. The concept elaborates on the social role of a female to stay home. Therefore, if the shoe is worn it means she is out, and the society gets the opportunity to talk behind her back about the fact that the female is out when she is expected to be home.
5. A lipstick holder that is locked and unlocks randomly when asked to open. It is a metaphor for an authority figure. The lock reflects the authority's imposed decision on Qatari female youth to take certain actions they have asked permission to do. The randomness reflects the irony of reality about the reasons behind having those requests rejected.
6. A pair of black sunglasses with a pattern on the lenses to limit the view of the user. This is a silent protest against the limited view of society's perception by allowing the female youth to experience that blindness to become aware of it. The beauty of the sunglasses and the pattern on the lenses are designed to draw attention from onlookers and toraise questions.
7. A cozy, luxury pajama set for the Qatari female youth, reflecting the concept that women are expected to stay home and be provided for. It consists of a high-necked PJ, which allows for limited movement, and eye mask and ear cover. This set reflects concepts of being comfortable but trapped, being beautiful but robbed of one's senses. It alludes to the traditional social expectation of females' being at home and being provided for by men.
8. Disposable, portable tissue boxes that contain family's and society's demotivating dialectic Qatari statements etched on the tissues. These boxes are separated by themes related to their topics; they're divided into three themes of gender difference (pink box), authority (black box) and



Figure 14. Project 6 creation process

social judgment (beige box). The tissue boxes have different statements in them. The gender difference box (pink), contains statements such as, “He is a boy; therefore, he can...;” “No matter what, the man has nothing to be ashamed of.” The authority box (black) has statements such as: “You don’t even have hope of it!” “Close this topic, lock it, take the key and throw it in the sea.” The social judgment box (beige) contains statements about: “Where are we going to hide our face from people?” “What are we going to tell people?”

The collection of critical design objects aims to communicate sensitive issues, such as inequality, that many Qatari female youth and even adults can connect to and relate with as part of their life experience in Qatar. I designed the eight objects explained above to address different issues mainly focusing on the social judgment and authority. The objects are focused more on the social judgment because it is such a big part of Qatar’s structure and its social expectations and judgments have become common beliefs. The second focus is on the authority in the family since it is one of the most important ingredients in Qatari youths’ becoming individuals. The gender difference is the common thread in both these foci because of the constant comparison of the genders in both social and familial contexts; for this reason it is perhaps one of the most significant problems that is undermining the Qatari society, especially female youth.

The result of this study is not only a set of critical design objects to affect the life of female youth in Qatar but also my realization of the greater power of design beyond aesthetic, and how we can affect social change through design. By using critically designed everyday objects to stimulate awareness, we employ the users’ own self-realization in the process of change. Rather than telling the user what to question or change through language, via critically designed objects, the *user* could become conscious of self-realized questions and needs for change. This convincing of the individual by the individual could be the basis for lasting improvement at the level most important for the positive growth of Qatari society that would ultimately accomplish Qatar’s 2030 National Vision.



Figure 15-1. Project 1 creation process

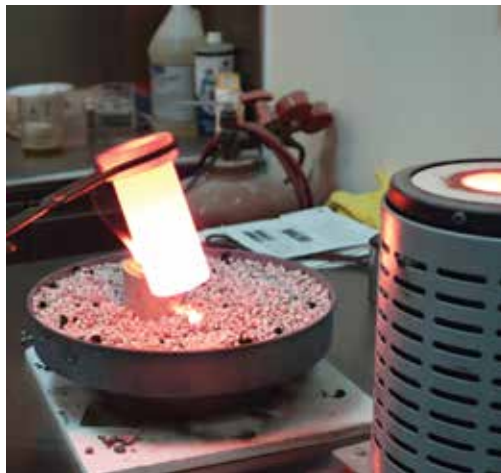


Figure 15-2. Project 1 creation process

Figure 15-3. Project 1 creation process



Figure 16-1. Project 2 creation process

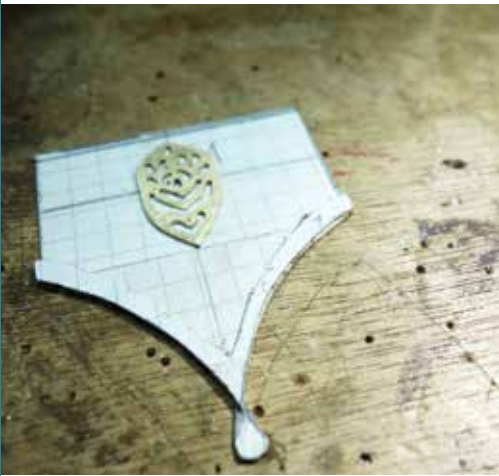
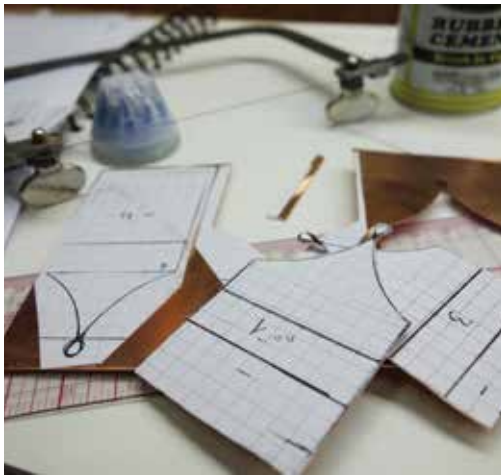
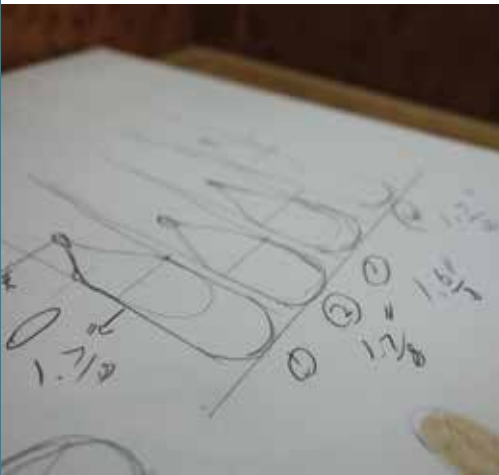


Figure 16-2. Project 2 creation process

Figure 16-3. Project 2 creation process



Figure 17-1. Project 3 creation process

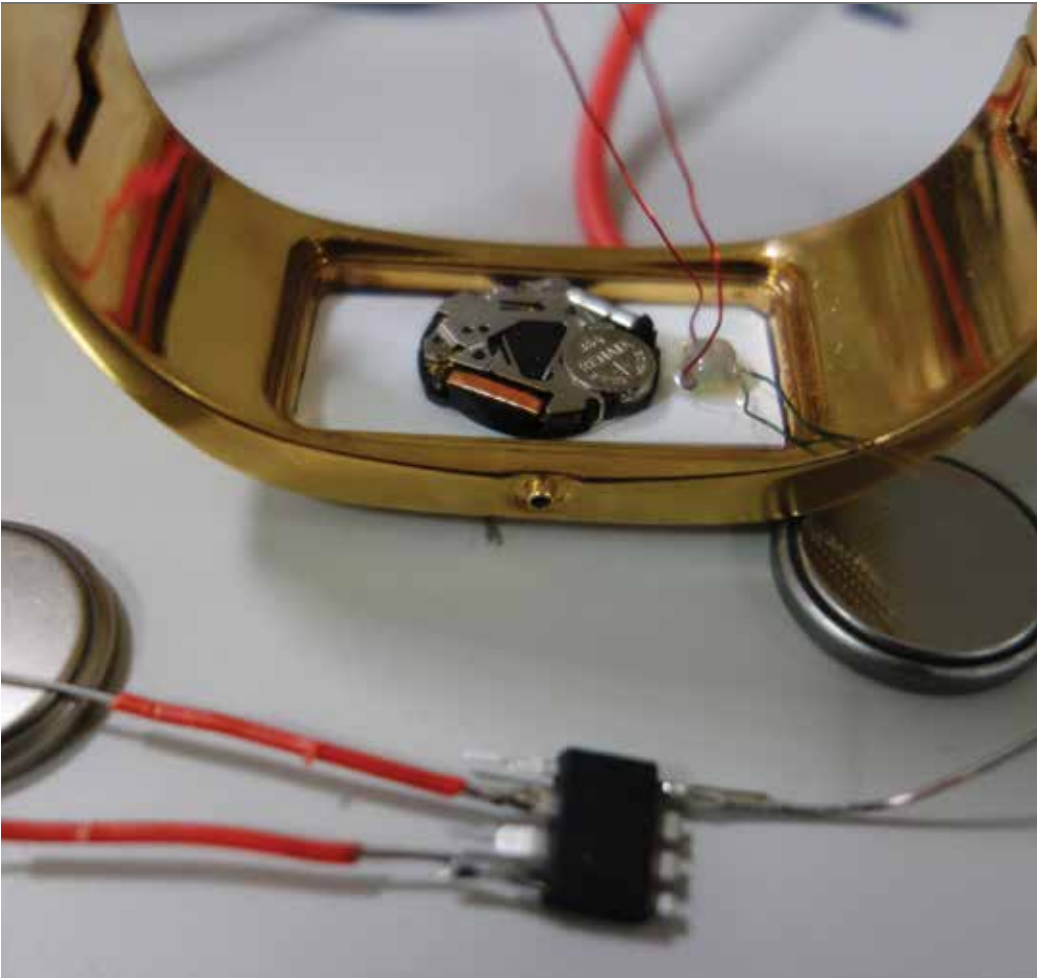


Figure 17-2. Project 3 creation process



Figure 18-1. Project 4 creation process

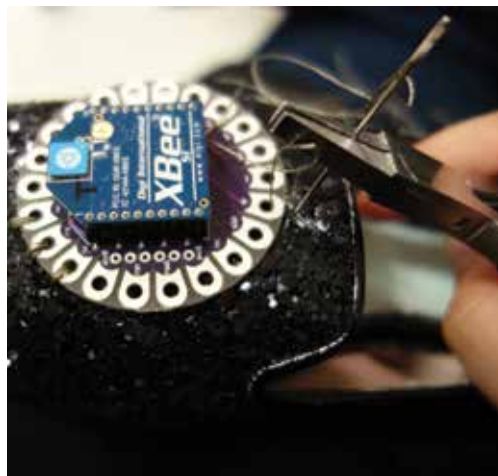
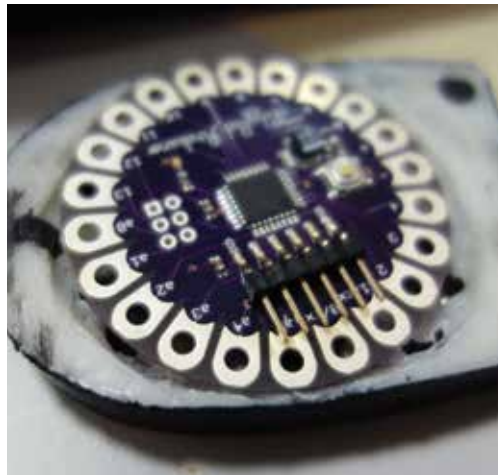
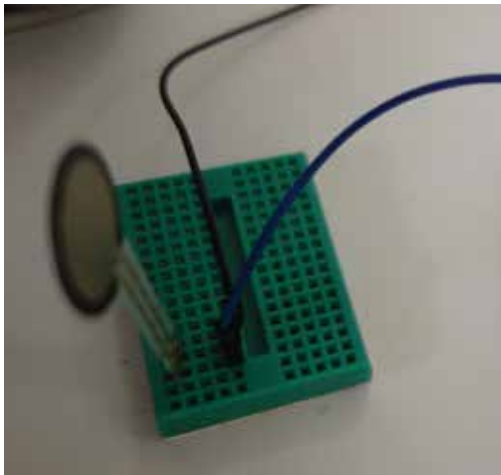
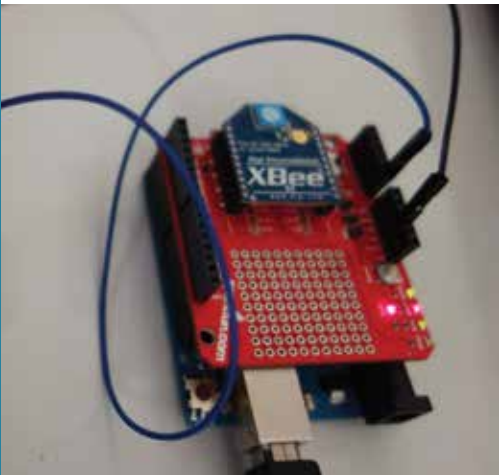


Figure 18-2. Project 4 creation process

Figure 18-3. Project 4 creation process

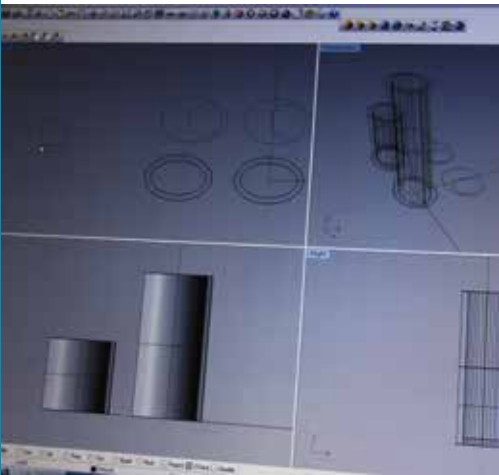


Figure 19-1. Project 5 creation process



Figure 19-2. Project 5 creation process

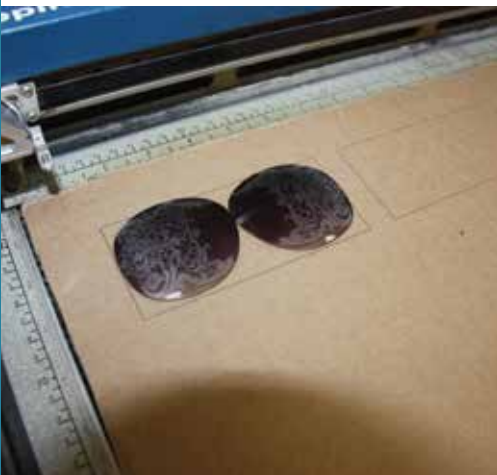


Figure 20-1. Project 6 creation process



Figure 20-2. Project 6 creation process



Figure 21-1. Project 7 creation process

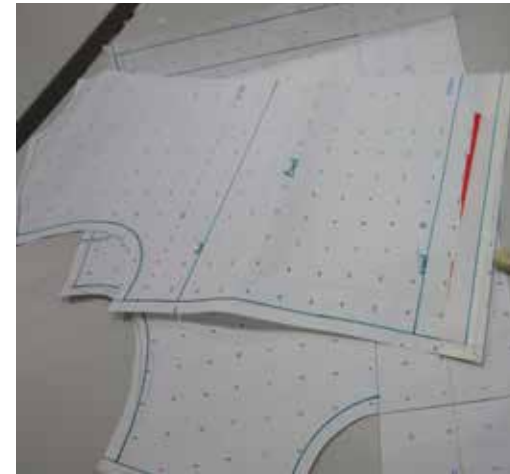
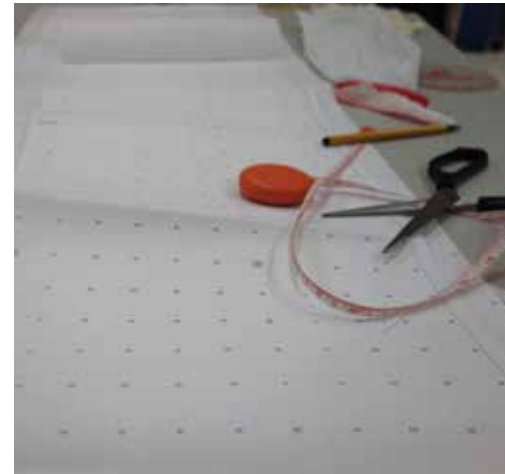


Figure 21-2. Project 7 creation process



Figure 22-1. Project 8 creation process

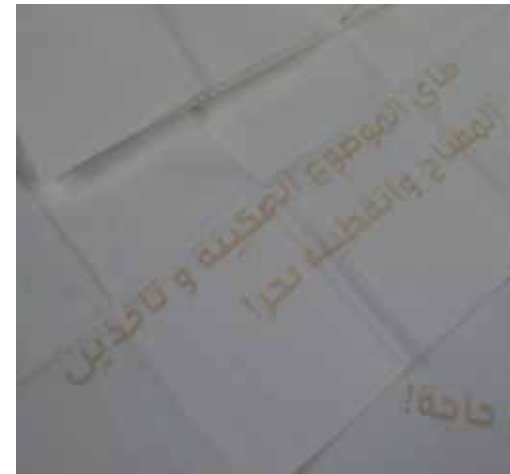
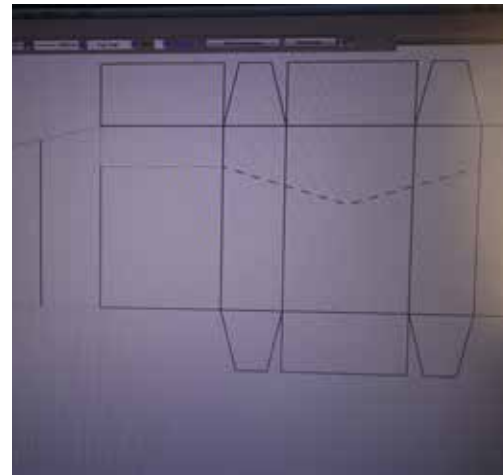


Figure 22-2. Project 8 creation process

PROJECT 1

Gold earrings with precious stones that work as an earplug to stop the female Qatari youth's hearing social judgment. The size, placement, and diamonds effectively call attention and raise a question about the unusual placement. The concept acts as a metaphor about protecting the person from the "hurtful noises" of the society.



Figure 23-1. Project 1



Figure 23-2. Project 1

PROJECT 2

A set of gold finger caps, each with a small, dark diamond, that seats on the ends of the fingers to visually equalize their length. The jewelry pieces reflect the concept of social expectation to be similar to your peers, without standing out, which discourages individuality and leadership. This illustrates the effect of distorting similar things into sameness, in the same way that the society tries to push the female youth to be the same. The effect of such force is clearly disturbing the original function of the fingers the same way it would affect a society full of conforming females.



Figure 24-1. Project 2



Figure 24-2. Project 2

PROJECT 3

A gold and diamond watch that glows 12 times, calling for attention, when it strikes 12. The number 12 symbolizes the 12 grades of precollege education, immediately after which the girls are socially expected to marry. By that time they are not only socially prepared to marry, but they are also psychologically convinced that it is the time for marriage when it does not have to be.



Figure 25-1. Project 3



Figure 25-2. Project 3

PROJECT 4

A glittery black shoe with gold decoration, which automatically tweets braggingly about itself while being worn outside. By doing this, it alerts family and society to take notice of its actions. The concept elaborates on the social role of a female to stay home. Therefore, if the shoe is worn it means she is out, and the society gets the opportunity to talk behind her back about the fact that the female is out when she is expected to be home.



Figure 26-1. Project 4



Figure 26-2. Project 4

PROJECT 5

A lipstick holder that is locked and unlocks randomly when asked to open. It is a metaphor for an authority figure. The lock reflects the authority's imposed decision on Qatari female youth to take certain actions they have asked permission to do. The randomness reflects the irony of reality about the reasons behind having those requests rejected.



Figure 27-1. Project 5

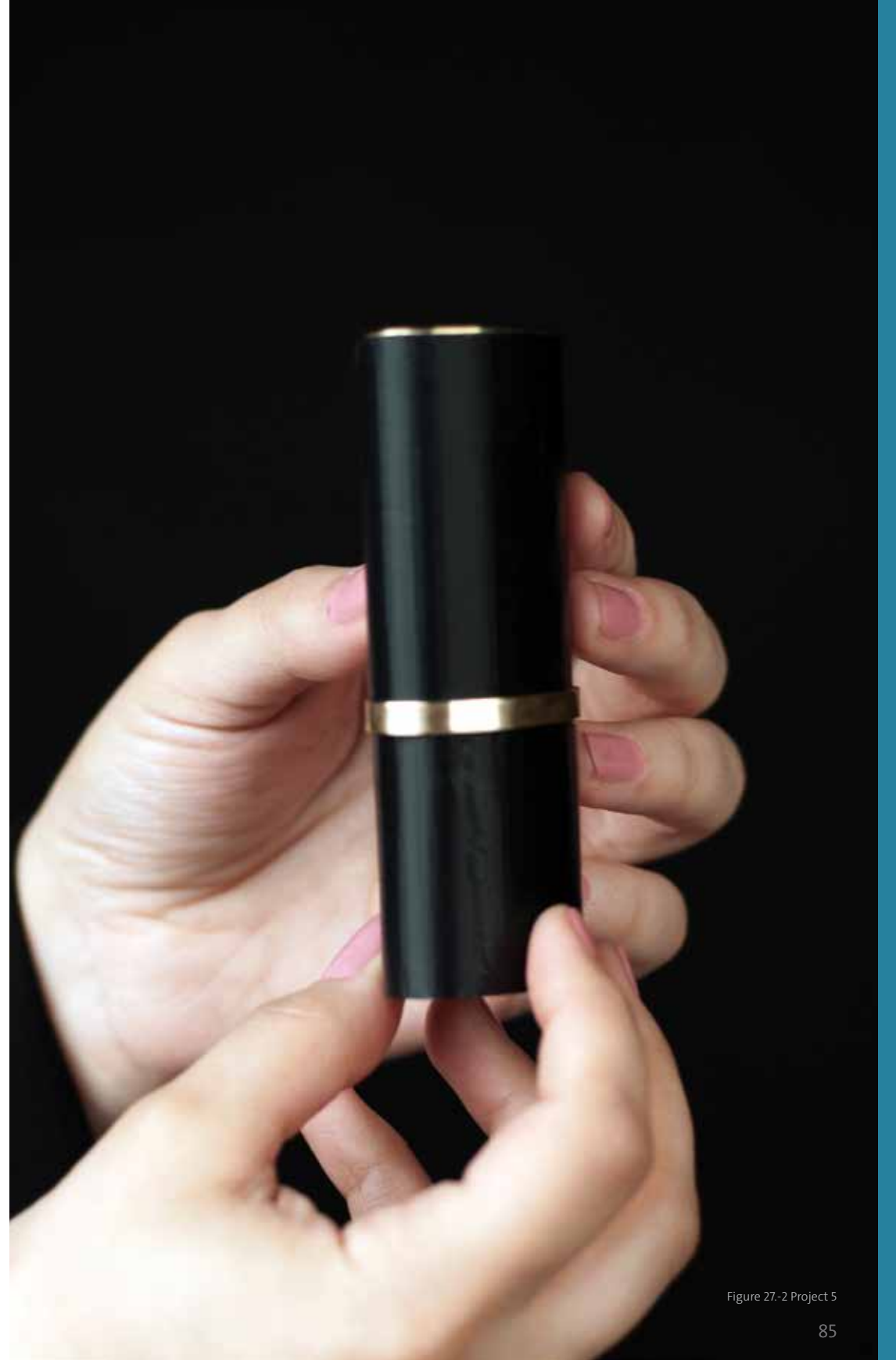


Figure 27-2 Project 5

PROJECT 6

A pair of black sunglasses with a pattern on the lenses to limit the view of the user. This is a silent protest against the limited view of society's perception by allowing the female youth to experience that blindness to become aware of it. The beauty of the sunglasses and the pattern on the lenses are designed to draw attention from onlookers and to raise questions.



Figure 28-1. Project 6



Figure 28-2. Project 6

PROJECT 7

A cozy, luxury pajama set for the Qatari female youth, reflecting the concept that women are expected to stay home and be provided for. It consists of a high-necked PJ, which allows for limited movement, and eye mask and ear cover. This set reflects concepts of being comfortable but trapped, being beautiful but robbed of one's senses. It alludes to the traditional social expectation of females' being at home and being provided for by men.



Figure 29. Project 7

PROJECT 8

Disposable, portable tissue boxes that contain family's and society's demotivating dialectic Qatari statements etched on the tissues. These boxes are separated by themes related to their topics; they're divided into three themes of gender difference (pink box), authority (black box) and social judgment (beige box). The tissue boxes have different statements in them. The gender difference box (pink), contains statements such as, "He is a boy; therefore, he can...;" "No matter what, the man has nothing to be ashamed of." The authority box (black) has statements such as: "You don't even have hope of it!" "Close this topic, lock it, take the key and throw it in the sea." The social judgment box (beige) contains statements about: "Where are we going to hide our face from people?" "What are we going to tell people?"



Figure 30-1. Project 8



Figure 30-2. Project 8

7. Further direction

This research is the beginning of a conversation about female obstacles that hinder Qatari youth from becoming individuals. The conversation starts by looking at family, society, and how they encourage and nurture the youth. The research would further, after this thesis, investigate the external and internal forces that make an independent young female. The research could develop by creating the critical design object to use in the everyday life context to stimulate thought and raise questions among a larger audience. After that, it can start investigating possibilities of how to impact female youth to become individuals who dream and achieve. This research could also develop further by looking at different age groups and genders using different research methods to connect to the audience and gather information.

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9. Appendix

INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

a. Interview one

A 17-year-old girl whom I interviewed in her house. I felt like this interview was a reassurance for my thesis subject and its importance. She seemed like she did not have a clue about anything in life, but she did, and she felt strongly about her family and friends. She cared for love and honesty, not talking behind people's backs. Her mobile device was the object that she would carry around most and would like to constantly change because she gets bored with it. Shoes interested her. She did not spend so much time online or on Twitter. She wants to become a lawyer yet doesn't have any information about what it means, or know people of that profession. She liked her personality and was interested in getting to know new people. She does not have many friends that she considers close. BBM (blackberry messenger), friends, and going out are on top of her list.

b. Interview two

An 18-year-old girl interviewed in her house. She cared for praying and God and had religious beliefs. She realizes the importance of education and the future. She also wants to become a lawyer but does not know why or even what a lawyer does, cares about social gatherings and family, is close to her mother and friends. She is interested in adventures and traveling, and is connected to her friends through BBM she likes social networks to be connected to her friends and to see what they are doing at all times.

c. Interview three

An 18-year-old girl in grade 12 in English system education with only two subjects left to study. She has a deep interest in music and playing piano. She is proud of her musical achievement but not so open as to share it with people. She does not trust people easily, and friends are also a big part of her life, but family is the most important part. Music to her is not viewed as a future potential career, and she spends a lot of time sleeping. She does not have many people to share her interest with.

d. Interview with a teacher

In the Um-Ayman High School I interviewed the chemistry teacher, Fatma Al-Khateeb, who has been a teacher for fourteen years, to realize her opinion about high school students and how the educational system was different in the past. This interview helped to get a teacher's perspective on youth today and how they are coping with the modern world. One of the main challenges that she faces today is the Internet. The Internet has been the biggest change in the educational system, because before that, education was limited to books, and research was done only certain ways. Through the Internet students have access to everything, and sometimes they can even know more than the teacher if they are interested in learning. The teaching in the class has become more stimulating by combining different media to teach. This openness sometimes can lead to distraction as well, because the students may say that they can see this video later on their own time. Why do they need to see it here and now? In the process they could get distracted by the temptations of the Internet access and sidebars of the websites. Generally, it makes the work of a teacher harder because the teacher today must be on top of everything at all times and always bring something different to the class other than what the students can find on their own. She believed that the students need to be monitored online because research appears to be the excuse to spend hours online, and parents cannot really stop them because research is part of the study requirement. Most of the students use the Internet for chatting. They may also look at websites that are inappropriate for their age and the culture, because at this age they do have a sense of curiosity and want to know what's happening.

She followed by saying an adult may get lost in the world of the Internet, so what happens to the young person? The young adults nowadays are distracted, as Al-Khateeb mentioned; furthermore, she identifies the Internet as the main cause of the distraction. The students communicate to each other about things that seem to be forbidden that they may have come across by accident and were drawn towards. The family needs to become more open and to converse with them and ask for their opinions about such things and how they as young adults can help in solving the problems.

She believed that today monitoring the students' activities online seems almost impossible, in schools or homes. The teacher recognized the upbringing of the youth as the tool to guide the students and keep them away from these kinds of distractions. Unfortunately, today the behavior, and moral part of education has been diminished, and it mainly focuses on the education and teaching the subjects. The students do not even accept small comments from the teachers other than those about the subject matter. They act as if "it is none of your business."

Al-Khateeb's experience showed her that the parts of the subjects that students are more interested in are to see the real applications of things in life. They are also interested more in social sciences and cultural discussions and relate to them. The new generation has some opinions about things. Of course, the family opinion matters a lot, and the students have more than one source to consult with if they want to. Yet the family's opinion and the society's acceptance are important matters to them. In some cases those pressures can stop the progress of the student; however, this is not always bad because every family and community have their own traditions, which should be respected. Sometimes the school creates clubs for all subjects, and they are trying to create a program around talent to accommodate them.

When asked about students' drive, Al-Khateeb stated that the students themselves do not start new initiatives in the school but say, "It is none of my business"; nevertheless, when they feel that someone cares and has started an activity for them, they become involved and they ask about it and look forward to it. They need someone to care by starting things for them to follow. She mentioned most of the students do not have so many future goals, and many of them just want to work right after high school and get a good salary. There are some who want to continue their education after high school and even some who are willing to study abroad. This interview gave a little insight on the teachers' point of view about the students.

e. Interview four

In Um-Ayman high school I interviewed one student in grade twelve who was 19 years old to get a wider perspective on the female youth lifestyle. She spoke English very well and had an interest in art. She described herself as imaginative, creative, and she likes to paint and draw. She enjoys different cultures and learning about them and their language and history, for example, French and Tagalog. She likes to learn about them to be able to communicate with them and avoid misunderstandings. She also enjoys reading fictional stories like the House of Night Series by P.C. Cast, a novel writer, about vampires and how they hide in human society. She enjoys songs with deep meaning that help inspire her drawings and mood. She wants to go to Texas A&M University to study chemical engineering like her dad and maybe to VCUQ because she enjoys drawing. She has a supportive family who respect her decisions. Her favorite teacher is kind, supportive, and always makes time for the students. She likes playing basketball and badminton. Galaxy Tab is her favorite device, which helps her communicate with her friends inside and outside the country. Her best friend lives in Abu-Dhabi, plus she has other friends who are not from the Middle East. Some Important things to her are spending time with family, resting and baking sometimes, studying, and checking emails. She would like to spend more time with her sister. She would like to try a day as a teacher to learn how it goes because they are so busy, yet they care about students and work hard for them. If she could be someone else for the rest of her life, she would be an artist because she enjoys art. She hates disrespect and acting inappropriately. Her family, and especially her sister, makes her happy. War, fighting, and disagreements in the world make her sad because she believes that we are all the same. She has an interest in digital objects because they make her curious to know what is inside and how they work.

This interview was completely different from my previous interviews I had with the girls in the first experiment. She was one of the students who cared about her education and illustrated a different category of teenagers. Yet, the family role and the importance of the family have been consistent. The other common thing was their care for justice, humanity, and the hope for the wars to stop.

f. Group interview

In addition to this interview with the 19-year-old girl, I interviewed a group of three female students in grade 11, and they also shared these concerns and cares for family despite their differences. This group seemed interested in life and had much more maturity and sensitivity than the young females I interviewed in experiment one. One of them defined herself as secretive and the other one as the person who likes to have things under control. The third described herself as cheerful. They were interested in social issues related to culture and a TV show that is shown on MBC1, *The Eight*, which speaks about problems in Saudi Arabia, which the students defined as similar to the Qatari culture. They mentioned that they relate to some of those issues, although they are in Qatar. Specifically, they like the cultural and social issues the program introduces; they especially like the fact that it is honest and it brings different opinions and arguments. Two of them were very interested in animated movies, Korean pop, English pop, Japanese series, and culture. The third student was more into Arabic songs that have deep poetry. They like to read fictional stories and romance. Family, praying, the Internet, and going out are important things for them. One of them mentioned she would like to go study abroad, and she had a language course in London where she traveled alone. She enjoyed her experience independent of her family, and this was a thing that she would like to do again. Going to college was an important thing for the other two students as well. They all wanted to be a boy for one day to be free and do whatever they want without being questioned. A good day contains connecting with other people and watching shows online. Friends and family are the sources of joy in life. The things that make them sad are that someone rejects their request, stress, and their friends' being upset with them. The smile and the eyes get their attention in other people. They are interested to learn new languages, too. Their family level of education and ambition was high, and they wanted to follow their footsteps. They understood the value of education.

One of them wanted to go to a Korean concert. They were interested in extracurricular activity and wanted more activities in the school. One of them mentioned that in Japan the students have 47 activities to choose from, and they have subjects to choose from, too. In their school structure they view the teachers as people who don't respect the students or give them any importance. They reported that their teachers just yell and say bad words; sometimes they cannot even teach the subject or do not have the right

personality and power to run a classroom. There is no freedom for the student to do anything, and the teachers doubt and do not believe the students. Respect for students was one of the main things that was lacking.

g. Concluding interview summery

This group of interviews represents different group of Qatar female youth. Overall these interviews allowed me to understand the problem and even change my own perception about the them because I as many other people judged the Qatari females youth to be un motivated; however, the further i researched and the more I interacted with them it became apparent that it is not only them, but it is the society that pressures them and stops them from dreaming and achieving.

